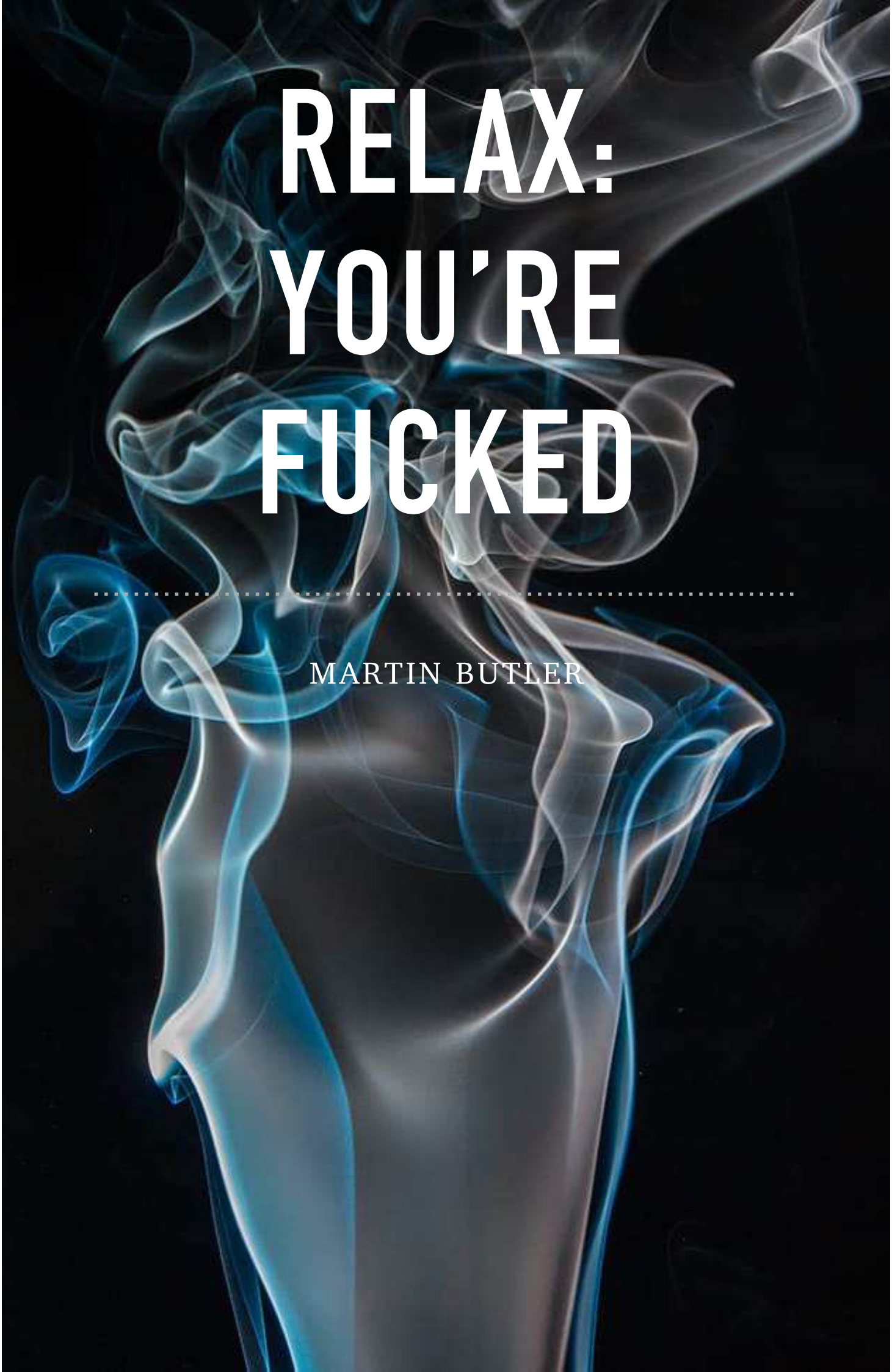
RELAX:
YOU'RE
FUCKED
MARTIN BUTLER

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The head can whinge as much as it wants, the body will still insist on food

INTRODUCTION

You are fucked. Let's not beat about the bush. You will live a life with small pleasures, not so small pains, and then die. That being the case it seems surprising that trees are not to be found everywhere with ropes hanging from them. Well, despite all the moaning and gloom, it turns out we have a body that wants to live, and will do almost anything to ensure it keeps living. The head can whinge as much as it wants, but the body will still insist on food, shelter, warmth, sex and some level of general care. In fact, the head is the slave of body in any case, it spends all its days working out the best way to get the things the body needs - and the rest of the time it spends complaining.

Seeing as we tend to avoid pain and gravitate toward pleasure (even if the only pleasure we have is complaining), it would seem to make sense to find ways of dealing with life that encourage pleasure and minimize the pains. The seventy or so aphorisms, with their brief commentaries should help you do this. If they don't well - personally I don't care - you are fucked anyway.

You will be called selfish when you resist a request from a selfish person.

EVERYDAY LIFE

Definition of an optimist: someone who is a master of self-deception and denial.

Have you made your five positive affirmations this morning? And I hope your schedule is filled with power meetings, a trip to the gym, dinner with Fred and Sally, and anything else you can cram into the day - because the one thing you cannot afford to do is be still. Oh no, to be still means that you might start thinking about stuff - you know, death, futility, meaninglessness, and so on. Better keep busy - stay in denial. And shucks your "millionaire by Christmas" plans came to naught, as did your plan to lose fifty pounds - carefully monitored on your iPhone app. It's those donut binges that did it - comfort food to distract you from all the emotional pain. What, with the world not contorting itself to deliver on your juvenile ambitions, and that extra weight (donuts), and your relationship falling apart because your partner is sick of having their expectations raised by your wild imaginings, the only thing you are likely to achieve is extreme misery. But a new set of ra-ra morning affirmations should sort it all out.

Meanwhile, your friend Joe the pessimist, who you secretly despise, seems to be doing rather well. All those negative thoughts he entertains when setting out on a project - he considers that things might actually go wrong, and he even plans for it. Just as well that you are a master of self-deception and denial because its the only thing you have left.

Great news, your situation is hopeless.

You can know nothing except the certainty that you will die. On the surface it would seem that there is nothing you can do to alleviate this situation - which is exactly the point. Your situation is hopeless - abandon all efforts to make it otherwise and float downstream.

A being that cannot know what it will be thinking in a minute's time, or whether it will even be alive, can make no claims of being in control.

We so much want to be in control. To be in control is to be safe - or so we tell ourselves. So it would be fair to say that our illusion of control is driven by fear, and particularly fear of the unknown. It also follows that relinquishing control will invoke even more fear, and so it might just be better to carry on with the illusion - but there is a price to pay. All the spontaneity and joy disappears from life as we become increasingly bracketed by our control mechanisms. Children, after all, revel in being out of control and with it

comes play and spontaneity. It's your call - hide away within your illusion of control and live a well-ordered but dull life, or drop the pretense of control and feel the fresh breeze of freedom blow through your psyche.

By craving freedom you become less free.

Most people have a relatively naive idea of what freedom might be - lots of money, limitless power, going off-grid, deliverance from mortal life. Money comes with emotional bondage - people worry about it more when they have lots of it than they do when they have just a modest amount. As for power - well, power is something that has to be safeguarded 24x7 - there is always someone else ready to take it. Going off-grid is usually day-in and day-out hassle. And any notion of a "spiritual" deliverance from this human life is just imagination. If someone craves freedom, it merely means they are not free - and how could they be? We are determined by cause and effect, just like everything else - organic robots. The only freedom that is available to human beings is the total acceptance of their lack of freedom. Only then do we stop struggling against the inevitable and can sit back and row our boat gently down the stream.

Misery always follows gratification.

We all go running after gratification - a sense of fullness to fill an otherwise yawning emptiness. Gratification comes from pleasures of the body - a delicious meal, good sex, a workout in the gym. It can also come from pleasures of the mind - a task completed, viewing a beautiful vista, a skill learned. Spiritual people seek the ultimate gratification - enlightenment or salvation - a gratification that never ends. But here is the rub. You've attained or experienced whatever gratification was in your line of sight - then what? When you've got to the top of the roller-coaster, there is only one way to go - down. And so the gratification seekers live this neurotic life of highs and lows, desperately seeking a new high that doesn't have a low. The cold-turkey after gratification is experienced as a state of misery. Spiritual folk are more afflicted with this than your average Joe. They swing between the euphoria of meeting their new guru to the realization that it's the same old crap they just abandoned - but the search goes on.

Violence - when one entity diminishes the survival prospects of another entity. All life is violent.

You cannot live without violence, after all you do eat things that have been killed on your behalf. But it goes much deeper than this. The rich exploit the poor. The poor have lower life expectancy - this is violence. Ideologies, religions,

and vested interests bring about war. People die - this is violence. Envy is systemic - the delight in another's misfortune and pain at their good fortune - this is violence. Nature's signature is violence.

Every decision you ever make will be a mistake.

Those people who are always telling you what might have happened in their life if only they had not had such shit parents or shit teachers, or if they had just taken that opportunity to become a famous Hollywood actor. And if they had jumped on that lucky break to become a famous actor, they would now be whining that they missed the opportunity to become a quantum physicist because acting sucks and is so dull. We all go through life, thinking that if only we had decided that way instead of this, we'd be much happier. This type of thinking is the dumbest type of thinking a human being is capable of. First, we believe we had a choice and that given the same circumstances, we would act differently, and second, we think that things would have been much better if only we had made different decisions - duh. So let it be known that all the decisions you ever make will be mistakes, and more than this, they will be the only decisions you are going to make anyway.

Don’t be afraid of the bad times, it is the good times that should be feared - they will give you confidence and hope and you will be poorly prepared for the bad times that inevitably follow. Don’t be a sucker.

That person you fancy is warming to your advances, and you just got a significant pay rise at work. In a few days, you fly off on vacation in Hawaii, and your doctor just gave you a clean bill of health. You glow in your well-being and good fortune - until you don't. The hotel shown in the travel brochure is nothing like the pit you find yourself staying in. Your employer is having hard times and has to fire you, and that person you fancied has just given you the cold shoulder. And then to cap it all, something starts growing on the side of your nose - not dangerous apparently, but very unsightly. Life set you up, and then it pulled the rug from under your feet. It doesn't do to anthropomorphize life, but let's do it anyway. So, being a spiteful little fucker, life delivers a whole pile of goodies, and you feel on top of the world. As soon as you've been set up, life is free to stick the knife in. And life sticks the knife in for all of us sooner or later - we die. But there are plenty of little deaths along the way. The moral of the story is "don't believe in life," and by "believe," I mean, don't be suckered. When things are going well, just remember that the only way will be down from the crest of your wave. As a result, you will be less prone to the games of the spiteful little fucker.

Nature doesn't require that you are happy or sane, it just requires that you procreate and then die.

Happiness and misery are no concern of nature. The machinery of nature wants you to procreate, live long enough to rear your offspring, and then fade into oblivion. During this journey, life has no regard for your mental state provided you get the job done, and so it becomes your responsibility to ensure, as far as you can, that life is tolerable and maybe even happy. Our natural drivers would tend to push us in the direction of misery since we are loaded up with obligations and stressful situations, all of which take our energy and usually make us anxious. This being the case, it isn't too difficult to see that happiness is not a natural state and requires an individual to have self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. It needs us to be unusually self-focused and not to accept the default state of being a bag of genetics that nature can use to create another generation - which in turn will do the same. Happiness is your responsibility. Take the hand that nature deals, and happiness may be elusive. Take the trouble to come to understand yourself and the way the world works, and happiness (or at least less misery) is a genuine possibility. Nature doesn't even require that you are sane; simply pass on your genetics to the next generation, and you might as well have been Einstein as far as nature is concerned. Happiness is against nature.

Hang loose - you have control over absolutely nothing.

You don't have much control over your body; it can give up the ghost any time it pleases. As for emotions, there isn't much control there either - if you happen to see your partner kissing in an alleyway with someone else, your feelings will be all over the place. And thoughts - you have no idea what you will be thinking in a minute from now, so no control there either. External events are pretty much outside your control too. You might try and control people around you, but they will be mentally sticking the finger up and doing their own thing anyway. Whether your train is late, your flight delayed, the traffic congested, the weather cold, your TV busted, or whether you are sniffling with a cold - all of these things are entirely outside your control. This is good news really - hang loose, you have control over absolutely nothing.

You will be called selfish when you resist a request from a selfish person.

There is a strange twist in the way the word "selfish" is used. People who make demands on others will often call a person who rejects their demands - selfish. But surely the person making the demand is the selfish one - the one expecting someone else to modify their behavior to suit their needs. So I think we can say that a person is selfish when they expect others to obey their bidding. As an

example, let's consider someone who likes reading and wants to spend the evening finishing off a book they've enjoyed. When their partner suggests that they go out to a restaurant, the bookworm politely declines, only to be called selfish. But of course, it's the restaurant-goer that is being selfish. To expect someone to comply with one's inclinations is an act of selfishness. Unless there is mutual agreement on an issue, leave people alone - don't be selfish.

The need for external validation and approval is slavery.

Did you brush your teeth this morning? What!!! No! You dreadful person, how can anyone love you anymore, and everyone you meet will secretly be wanting to wear a gas mask because of your halitosis, and people will be sniggering behind your back. Actually - no one cares whether you brushed your teeth this morning or not. But the reality - that no one gives a damn about you is not at the root of all this. Because you have such low self-esteem, and because you have been programmed to be polite and not do things that might be considered weird, so you desperately seek the approval of people around you. But it goes much deeper than this. Since you no longer know who you are and do not possess the reassurance that would come from this self-knowledge, so you want external validation for your values, beliefs, ambitions, and even the

way you feel. And so you might ask whether life has a purpose. It is no longer enough to trust your instincts and desires; you need some external authority figure to tell you what the meaning of life is. There is no shortage of people willing to tell you the purpose of life - for a price - the same with how to live your life. Again, since your inner intuitions are buried under a ton of conditioning, so you can't even decide whether you want to spend the afternoon on the couch eating donuts, or whether you should go to the gym. This need for external validation and approval is nothing but voluntary slavery. We are like animals that have been caged all their life. When the doors of the cage are opened, the animals are fearful of leaving it. The doors of your cage are open - believe it or not. Find your purpose, follow your instincts and feelings; the universe itself has given you the freedom to do that. The only person that needs to validate and approve of the things you do - is you.

It requires a great deal of effort to realize that no amount of effort can bring satisfaction.

You can't get no satisfaction, even though you try, and you try, and you try. Well, I've got news for you - the harder you try, the less satisfied you will be. Maybe satisfaction is seen as endless sexual conquests - but it becomes tedious. The chat-up lines work every time, the slick manipulation works every time, and you are what an imbecile might call "good in bed." The central problem revolves around the fact that

pleasure is only experienced through differences. If every sexual partner is pretty much the same, it all becomes boring. So next time it has to be three in a bed, and then that becomes boring. And then ever more bizarre practices are called for to spice the whole thing up. No matter how hard you try you can't get no satisfaction - and here is the rub. The trying is the problem. Someone with a healthy appetite for sex will copulate when the desire is strong and feel some level of satisfaction afterward. But our sex-obsessed glutton isn't satisfied with that and goes chasing pleasure - big mistake.

Of course, it isn't just sex where people make great efforts to get some satisfaction. Look at the gourmet eater - lark's tongues in aspic become commonplace, and that five hundred dollar meal just an also-ran. If you really want to experience satisfaction fast for a week - and then eat a fifty-cent piece of bread - your imagination could not have anticipated such a pleasure. The same with sex - abstain for a month or two. The secret to satisfaction is in the not trying, and so you have to expend a great deal of effort to realize that no amount of effort can bring satisfaction.

The day after you die, the world will be pretty much identical with the day before you died. You are not the least bit important. Now isn't that a relief?

It's such a sad fact that no one will care about your death other than a handful of people who are close to you. Our craving for importance is a curse, although we nonetheless want to be important. By feeling and thinking we are important, we assign importance to our ambitions, plans, actions, and in the process, these ambitions, plans, and activities become "boss". They do not serve us - we serve them, and life becomes a striving to realize our importance through our plans and ambitions. The worst case of this behavior can be found in those whose self-importance has convinced them they should be famous. All ethical behavior, self-respect, and moderation go out the window, and it is not unknown for a person to destroy themselves in the process of chasing after fame. All of this can be cured through a simple remedy - the realization that the day after you die, the world will be pretty much identical with the day before you died. You and I, and even the most narcissistic, self-promoting, psychopath in the world will not affect the world through our death.

It's a beautiful and liberating thing to realize you are not the least bit important. Nothing you think, feel, or do, is important. So you can treat those things with the disrespect they deserve and drift through life without being

henpecked to death by those pesky ambitions, plans, and whatever other nonsense we conjure up because we think we are important. Now, isn't that a relief.

That we might one day know "the truth" is an outrageous lie.

Here we are trapped inside our sensory and conceptual prison, and we think we can know "the truth" - whatever that might be. It's a little like spending your life in a room with no windows and no access to the outside world and believing you can know what the world is without ever having seen it. You will, of course, construct an image of the world that is nothing more than a glorified image of the room you have been trapped in. In any case, what is this "truth" we are always chasing, and that religious folk tend to claim to possess? Generally speaking, it is a claim to know how the world was made, its moral statutes, the nature of the soul - the ultimate reality in other words. I don't think the universe knows anything about "truth" - it's a human thing. We have factual truths (the sky is blue), and we know logical truths (all humans die, Socrates was a human, Socrates died). Beyond these truths, we know nothing - and cannot know anything.

People who claim to know "the truth" should be viewed with suspicion. What they are claiming is certainty, and pretensions to certainty caused the Roman Catholic

Inquisition, Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and other abominations. The problem for human beings springs from the difficulty associated with saying and thinking, "I don't know." But pretensions to truth are insanity, and not knowing is sanity - choose sanity.

If you do not achieve your ambitions, you will be disappointed. If you do achieve your ambitions, you will be disappointed.

You set your heart on that promotion, and you didn't get it. Of course, you are disappointed; you already saw yourself bossing the plebeians, setting impossible targets so you could watch them sweat, and glowing in the ass-kissing. But now your rival has got the job, and you will have to do the ass-kissing, and sweat to meet impossible deadlines, and suck up the bullying. Those who struggle relentlessly to become famous through some sad little channel on YouTube, or believe their shallow novel will rival Dan Brown or other massively successful authors - they will be disappointed too. But maybe, just maybe, it is all worth it for those who do realize their ambitions. Well, I have some news for you there. Realizing dreams is every bit as disappointing as failing to achieve them - it's just that the successful do not admit it. And why should they? To become successful in business, the arts, society, or whatever, almost invariably means becoming a monster to achieve such - and a wretched monster too. I won't name

names, but think of some wildly successful people and look at them - freaks. The central problem in all of this is that we derive pleasure from constant increases in good fortune, and not from one-off hits. So you inherit a hundred thousand dollars, and you feel happy. But soon enough, you start to take it for granted, and you want a million dollars. Meanwhile, most of your life sucks, and the rush of pleasure from the initial gain has worn off - and you find yourself at the starting line once again. It's the same with fame. Maybe you become famous within your local county, and that's great, but it soon wears off, and you want national recognition. There is no place of satisfaction in all of this. The downside is that to achieve what is achieved has cost you so much - personal relationships, maybe your health, your personal integrity (if you had any in the first place). Rabid ambition is just plain bad, whether you achieve those ambitions or not. Best to moderate your ambitions and the best way to do this is to remember that you will never find satisfaction through them.

All respondents but one replied in the negative when asked whether they would create a planet populated by creatures that had to kill and eat each other to survive. The one detractor went by the name of God.

We take it for granted that on this beautiful blue and green planet of ours that things have to savage and eat each

other to continue surviving - the red doesn't show in satellite pics. And we should remind ourselves that the desire to survive is the strongest desire we have, and the one we dedicate most effort to satisfying. So when a lion is ripping open the abdomen of a gazelle while it is still alive, the survival drive of the gazelle is wholly overwhelmed, causing immeasurable suffering. It's a particularly cruel setup - an all-consuming desire to survive, and the certainty, for human beings at least, that all the effort is in vain - we die, that is a certainty. Animals have been spared this ability to anticipate their death; even so, millions of male chicks are processed through shredders every day while fully conscious, simply because they have no value in the poultry industry. The industrialization of animal rearing and slaughter has been one of humanity's greatest "achievements." In any case, nature does its own thing in parallel with that of human beings, and in that sense, we are just magnifying the awful reality of life on this planet - for one creature to live, it has to kill and consume maybe hundreds of other creatures. Very few human beings would want it this way - but God/Nature/existence/the universe - whatever word you want to use - clearly does.

Trying to be happy will make you miserable. Being okay with misery will make you happy.

EMOTIONS

What we are looking for is ourselves

You don't have to be particularly insightful to realize that most people are searching for something. Generally speaking, they believe the "something" that will satisfy is external - material things, travel (romantic materialism), relationships, spiritual quests. We tend to be like homeless children hoping that the next passerby, be it a new job, a new partner, more money, a new guru, will give us a home. It never happens since the thing we are all looking for is ourselves. From childhood to responsible age, life is a process of conditioning, and the most tragic outcome of this conditioning is that we forget who we are. Our ambitions, role models, societal programming, education, all take us away from what we are. So by the age of twenty, we have a person within us that has been fully formed by external influences - the person we are gets buried and lost. The result is that we can spend the rest of our lives looking for ourselves, and under mounds of conditioning, that is not easy. In any case, most people have so much invested in their phony self that they would find it

impossible to abandon it and embrace the homeless child looking for a home.

As far as emotional states are concerned, don't fix - feel.

There is a natural tendency, encouraged by our notion of what is "normal", to want to fix many of our emotional states. Envy, jealousy, anger, hatred, boredom, and many other so called "negative emotions" are painful to some extent and so there often arises the desire to fix them. The fix often involves alcohol, entertainment, drugs, sex, comfort eating, spiritual pursuits, and many other marvelous inventions of recent times such as Facebook. The best way to deal with painful emotions is not to try and fix them but to go into them. Since emotions are in the body, someone who is sensitive to their bodily states can put their attention on the emotion as it manifests in the body. Doing this avoids denial and harmful habits and has the effect of "absorbing" the emotion within a relatively short span of time without side-effects.

Ambition is always dangerous territory, but spiritual ambition - enlightenment, moksha, salvation, nirvana - is the most dangerous of all.

Ambition is derived from a sense of lack. There would be no motive to do anything unless there was a perceived

lack, and lack is always associated with pain. So ambition is an attempt to attain something in order to alleviate a pain - a sense of lack. In ordinary life the ambitions include the desire for more money, power, sensual pleasure, but in the domain of spiritual ambitions people are looking for some kind of liberation from their miserable state - obviously, or they would have no desire to try and attain a different state. Instead of addressing the real reasons for their misery those with spiritual ambitions seek an escape route, and because these states that are sought are fictionsYou , so those with spiritual ambitions become frustrated and bitter - although they would never admit it. Spiritual ambitions are the most dangerous of all ambitions.

You can always not care. And even if you do care you can "not care" that you care.

In any given situation that needs attention we can do something or ignore it. To be stuck between the two - to be fretting over it but doing nothing is a mugs game. When I talk about care I'm not talking about helping the people around us if they need help, but simply the habit of sweating over things that cannot be addressed or that we do not want to address. Developing the habit of not caring saves a great deal of wasted energy and the distraction that comes with it. So, for something like climate change we either do our bit or forget about it - no point giving attention to something where there will be no action. But

being human beings we invariably do end up caring about things, although even here we can choose to not care that we care. World affairs, the plight of people we come in contact with, and our own situation, can all produce circumstances where we are invited to care. It's a good habit to learn not to care - either about things or the fact that we care. Life becomes less burdensome and the world continues to go its own sweet way.

As long as we strive we will suffer.

Striving and effort derive from a sense of lack. This lack might be purely physical, such as the need for food, liquids, sex, warmth. Or it might be intellectual - a striving to understand something. In all cases the sense of lack is a pain, otherwise we would not be motivated to address the pain through effort. Even the striving for more pleasure is an attempt to move from less to greater satisfaction. As long as we suffer we will strive.

Attempts to change are acts of violence against oneself.

Where on earth did you get the idea that you needed to change? Maybe it was one of those awful parents you had, or a schoolteacher, or maybe your "mates", and perhaps even that person you fancied but who played hard-to-get. Well, drop the idea of changing yourself; you are fine as you are. In any case, the people who would have us

improve only want us to do so for their benefit - to serve their purposes - why else would they want it. To change yourself to accommodate other people is an act of violence toward yourself. The problem often goes a bit deeper in that we might have had total bastards for parents who were always telling us to be smarter, more productive, not so lazy, more polite, and that we were a bad boy or girl. That stuff sticks, and when we get older, the bastard voice is still making itself heard in our head. All we can do is become aware of it and tell it politely to go fuck itself.

Hope is the destroyer of inner peace.

If you hope you also fear, and fear is the mind killer. The doubt that accompanies hope will eat you from the inside. Abandon your hopes and know peace.

Freedom is first and foremost freedom from oneself.

You like red roses, and seeing as it's your birthday, your partner has ordered six red roses. But when delivered, they are white - boo-hoo-hoo. You are so disappointed - it ruins your whole birthday, and you become the demon from hell for the next two days. After all, the entire world should pay due deference to you on your birthday, and those idiots at the florist got it all wrong. A step back. White roses are in no way inferior to red roses - looked at objectively. The problem is with you. Maybe when you were a child,

mummy always made sure you got exactly what you wanted - and if she didn't, you'd poke her in the eye. But now there is no one you can poke in the eye, and so you sulk for two days. People talk glibly about freedom, but the only freedom worth having is freedom from oneself - from one's acquired preferences, beliefs, opinions, ideologies, biases. If we are like a big stubborn lump of rock, lots of things are going to crash into us, and some will be bigger than we are. Better to drop all the conditioning (easier said than done) and let life go the way it goes with minimal resistance on our part. Only a person who is free of themselves can acquiesce to reality.

Denial of futility and emptiness is more painful than their acceptance.

Better keep busy because the bogeyman might get you if you rest for five minutes. Your busyness is like a skater on thin ice - to stop might result in you sinking into a bottomless pit of black, cold water - the realization of the apparent futility and emptiness of life. I say "apparent" because having told ourselves fairy stories about the big daddy in the sky, how our lives have a purpose, how tomorrow will be better than today, we automatically set up the opposites. You cannot think of black without automatically thinking of white. And so we cling on to the pretty stuff - meaning, purpose, self-importance, progress - and we studiously avoid their opposites - meaninglessness,

purposelessness, insignificance and degeneracy. So if you are going to believe that life has meaning and significance, it would be as well to accept the opposites of futility and emptiness, and this way, the bogeyman doesn't get a look in. Better than this however would be to throw ideas such as meaning and purpose into the trash can - they are human inventions dreamed up in an attempt to make life look prettier.

Saying "yes" to your being is the fastest way to exorcise your suffering.

Our suffering is our most precious asset. With it, we can evoke sympathy from others and protest against life with the knowledge that we are fully justified. Of course, the people on the receiving end of your whining wish you'd shut the fuck up, but being polite, they gesture appropriately at the right moments and make for the door as soon as they can - "oh gosh, is it that time already?". For most people, their suffering provides a familiar, comfortable place to rest, and they can feed on the sickly-sweet poison of their resentment. To say "yes" to one's existence, to one's desires and instincts, is incompatible with a festering pile of suffering. But here is the rub - resentment and hatred feed much more successfully on a person's inner world than they do on the outer world. You useless piece of shit, how many times have you tried to diet and failed? Why are you such an embarrassment? Who could love a person like you? These are the wages earned

from saying "no" to one's desires and instincts - to one's existence. Say "yes," and the cockroaches of self-hatred and inner resentment emerge from every corner and crevice and flee as quickly as they can in search of a new host.

If you want greater contentment and inner peace, you have to buy a one-way ticket into hell – your inner hell.

By the time you reach adulthood, your inner world is likely to resemble a pile of rotting garbage. It will be comprised of various ideas and behaviors imposed on you by the outside world - many of them contradictory, and almost all of them opposed to your real nature. When most people feel they need some inner peace, they go on meditation retreats - precisely the opposite direction they should be traveling. Spiritual workshops and meditation retreats are palliative. In keeping with big-pharma's lucrative strategy of developing drugs that treat symptoms instead of curing, so the self-help and spiritual industries delight in treating symptoms. If you want inner peace, you have to wrestle with demons - your demons. And what might these demons be? The million and one directives you ingested from the environment that make you feel bad - be industrious, be smart, make mommy happy, be polite, impress the neighbors - and many other notions that have a single root - our need for external approval.

In so-called spiritual pursuits, there are a thousand and one things that do not work and absolutely nothing that does work.

What does this word “spiritual” mean anyway? The definitions seem to be circular - “of the spirit.” Well, what is spirit? It’s spiritual. In any case, the chakra cleansing, the morning gratitudes, the revelations of the teacher, the hours of meditation - none of it seems to work, if by “work” we mean brings about a sense of contentment and peace. If it worked, we’d all be doing it, but the thousand and one things that we all try, prove to be utterly useless when it comes to curing our neuroses and pains.

There would be no market for the thousand and one things if people were already happy. The fact they are not points at causes deeper than the ones a chakra cleanse might address - it might be that people’s lives are all fucked up - too much anxiety, too many things to worry about, crappy relationships, a set of values that has no value. No, I don’t think a chakra cleanse will address any of those things. Play with the thousand and one spiritual things by all means, but don’t expect for a minute; it will change your miserable life - stronger medicines are required to do that, the first one being the realization of the folly of trying to change things.

You should know that romantic love almost always turns to hate. So be wary of love.

There are different degrees of love. At its most trivial, someone might proclaim that they love ice cream, or maybe they love surfing. This kind of statement gives us a clue to the nature of love - it is the experience of pleasure. Lovers are a mutual source of pleasure, and one of the most profound types of love is that of a mother for her child. It's easy to love something that brings pleasure and impossible to love something that is a pure source of pain. Romantic love is perhaps the most disfigured form of love. There is usually a mutual preening - a mutual flattering that takes place in romantic love. This flattery is obviously a source of great pleasure and is taken further when each sees the fulfillment of all their dreams in the other. But guess what? These projections of perfection onto the other person are bound to come undone, and when they do there will be pain. And so the process of unwinding expectations begins, and with it there is likely to be a growing sense of resentment and possibly hatred for the person who only a short while ago was the embodiment of perfection. It's this precipitous drop that causes the pain - from the height of ecstasy to the depths of disappointment. So you should be wary of romantic love, it has a nasty habit of turning into hate.

Trying to be happy will make you miserable. Being okay with misery will make you happy.

There is nothing more pathetic than someone who is striving to be happy. More than anything, it is a statement they are miserable and believe that by doing something or acquiring something they can become happy. If a person is unhappy no amount of doing and getting will make things better - it will make them worse. There might be a few moments of pleasure when taking the delivery of that super-duper auto that will take five years to pay off, but generally speaking, trying to be happy will make you miserable. And then there is the obvious question - what is wrong with misery? Oh sure, mummy and daddy told you not to be miserable, but fuck them. More generally, society operates on the basis that no matter how much pain we are in, we should always look on the bright side (of death). Well, fuck society too. Misery is a perfectly acceptable state, and the more you resist it, the more it will persist. So indulge in your misery - wallow in it, decorate it with ribbons, and feed it on caviar. Try to find things that will make you more miserable - feed it. The inevitable outcome of pampering your misery is that you will become happy, although we should never, ever make efforts to be happy - the striving will make you miserable.

If you trample all over your desires and instincts there will only be one outcome - resentment.

It's not like we are a blank sheet when we are born. Baby wants food, warmth, contact with mother, and it will poke her in the eye if it doesn't get these things. So we have desires and instincts, the most basic of which revolve around survival and procreation. As a result, food and sex are essential to most people over the age of eighteen say. But there are other desires - for power and fame, sensual pleasure, and if these desires are denied some expression, we get very resentful. It isn't uncommon to find someone resentful of the spontaneous manifestation of children simply because they might have been denied such expression when they were young, and are incapable of it in later life. And yet, spontaneity is often just a direct manifestation of a desire. The miser, someone who has denied themselves pleasure all their life, will resent seeing others indulge in pleasures. But this resentment can be turned inwards. Most people have some form of self-resentment. Maybe they dislike themselves when they are frivolous, or when they indulge in some level of excitement. The moral of the story is simple - if you trample all over your desires and instincts, you will resent your behavior and that of others.

Putting others down is the most popular way of lifting oneself up.

There's nothing more gratifying than asserting your superiority over someone else. It's the instant pick-me-up, and works on the principle that if others are weaker, you are stronger. The put-downs don't have to be particularly aggressive or explicit. "You looked better when you were slimmer." "Shame you didn't get that promotion." "That old auto of yours has served you very well." "Are you still trying to get fitter?" In all of these, there has to be the implicit message that things are somewhat better for you. So the quip about the old auto is best made when you have just taken delivery of a shiny, top-of-the-range, luxury auto. The timing is essential, but most people know how to do it instinctively anyway.

You see, it's all about power and changes of power. When other people are strong, and particularly when they display it, you will quite naturally feel a bit diminished. If everyone in your street has a new auto and you are still running around in an old banger, you will unavoidably feel disempowered. The same "old banger" would not be an issue if it was old bangers all the way down the street. These dynamics being the case, you can see how any opportunity to bring others down is going to be a lift for you.

The only alternative to this vicious little game is not to give a fuck - but that is a very, very, rare thing. To not give a fuck means you desire no approval from others around you. We can pretend we don't care, but that's worse than caring. To really not care is something that has to be earned, and most will not pay the price.

A fly will find dog shit beautiful. Human beings tend to find it repulsive. It all depends on whether a thing enhances or diminishes your well-being - that's all beauty and ugliness are.

There is no mystery surrounding what is beautiful and what is ugly. Beautiful things tend to be life-enhancing - they demonstrate power in some way. Ugly things are just the opposite - they potentially threaten the life force, and so are shunned. The perfectly formed flower is symbolic of the life force in action - it advertises its seeds, and as such, is partly sexual - it epitomizes the life force, and as such, we see it as beautiful. Contrast this with a wilting flower, the petals turning brown. No one would buy dying flowers, they have a smell of death about them, and so we see them as ugly. All of this depends on an item's relationship to the observer. Decaying flowers may look oh so beautiful and tasty to some types of insects - the healthy flowers, not so much. The night sky might be seen as beautiful - it is a display of power and might invoke all manner of emotions, including that of a sense of beauty. Dead, deformed

fetuses are seen as ugly by most people - they represent death. Beauty and ugliness are superficial things really, and the notion that "beauty is truth" is as wrong as anything could be - ugliness might be nearer to the truth.

Fuck you - I'm happier than you and my world is better than your world.

SOCIETY

When I am stronger, you are weaker. When I am weaker, you are stronger. This is the law of the beast.

If you understand these dynamics, you know pretty much everything you need to understand about most social interactions and life on this planet. The only people who want to see you stronger are those who rely on your strength - everyone else either doesn't care or would take some pleasure from seeing your power diminished. People in a competitive position would be the most likely suspects for wanting to see your power diminished - coworkers, rivals for a mate, competitive neighbors. We are involved in a struggle for existence, and so your weakness means you are less capable of acquiring the resources you need and this creates an opportunity for others to get what they need. Of course, the opposite applies. Those people you secretly hate would be diminished if your power was increased, and they would probably feel it. So let's be specific about power. Maybe it's money, and you inherit enough to buy yourself a luxury vehicle. Your power has been enhanced, and your neighbors will be spitting blood.

Or maybe you become famous for something you have done in your local community. Others who also crave fame will hate you. This is the law of the beast and there is no denying its operation in many areas of life. In more ruthless times, it may well have been the case that those who compete with you for resources would have seen your weakness as an opportunity to attack. These dynamics even apply to “polite” company, with all the posturing and bragging. If you bear this little rule in mind, most of the behavior you observe around you will be easily understood.

Fuck you - I'm happier than you and my world is better than your world.

Thus spoke the Facebook narcissist busy posting pictures of themselves with the miserable old git they married fifteen years ago. In the pics the Facebook narcissist and the miserable old git look rapturously happy, as they pose at the table in an upmarket restaurant to celebrate 15 years of misery together. Meanwhile the waiters, tired of taking Facebook pics, secretly spit in their soup. Fuck you, their world is better than yours. Even before the meal is finished the Facebook narcissist is posting pics on Facebook and Instagram, while the miserable old git looks on with contempt. But it won't be long before they are vacationing, and the miserable old git is already dreading the endless posing that will be demanded. Here we are, having a much

better time than you, says the Facebook narcissist, as a picture is posted of the two of them by the pool with their newly served cocktails. The miserable old git hates cocktails - but the Facebook narcissist insists they hold them up like a trophy and feign an expression of shameless ecstasy. Fuck you, their world is better than yours.

Other people's misery gives you pleasure.

You secretly like those programs about the homeless, about people with odd medical conditions, the destitute, the starving - you wouldn't watch them if there wasn't some secret pleasure involved. When others are weaker your are stronger - it's the law of the beast. Go on - admit you feel all secure and snuggly in your comfy home when you see pictures of people lay in doorways sleeping under sheets of cardboard. Of course, it would only be polite to express some concern, but your phony concern doesn't go deep enough for you to put your hand in your pocket, or God forbid, offer to help one of these unfortunates yourself. No, the unfortunates are good TV entertainment, and if the poor and dispossessed have been made scapegoats in your country, you may even want to see harm come to these people. Your fascination with other people's suffering is a primitive instinct - it makes you feel stronger because others are weaker, and it reassures you that all those bad things are happening somewhere else - until they're not.

Without courage - nothing.

The benefits of pessimism are numerous but they don't come without a price. If we are going to deal with reality we need to become acquainted with it, and that isn't always pretty. Unless a person has the courage to stare reality in the face, with all its cruelty and apparent futility then they will not have the knowledge to deal with life as it really is, and may just fall back on the fantasies of the optimist. It isn't enough to simply think about the nature of life, we have to understand it in the depths of us. But the strange thing is, that the more we contemplate on the barbarity and meaninglessness of life so it becomes less offensive, less threatening, and the more we can get on with living a pessimistic life. We have, in effect, exorcised the bogeyman - the facts that most people dare not acknowledge lest they should knock them down from their precarious perch of optimism. The courage we are talking of here is not all that common, and so the pessimistic way of life will always be for the minority.

If life is driven by deceit and lies (which it surely is), what is the value of truth?

Lying is systemic - we can't help it. "I've had no problems at all with her - she's a lovely motor.", says the man selling his wreck of a motor car to an unsuspecting buyer. "This has been a lovely home - so solid and nurturing.", says the

woman telling prospective buyers of the house that is about to have mining tunnels running underneath it. "Yes, I have lots of experience in just-in-time manufacturing.", says the job interviewee who doesn't even know what the phrase "just-in-time" means. Nature lies too - the angler fish with its little dangly thing that wiggles about just above its gaping mouth, luring smaller fish who think the dangly thing is food - only to be gulped down by the grotesquely looking angler fish. Or the venus-fly-trap that lures insects into its trap with a sweet-tasting nectar, or the invisible spider's web, or the moths that look like wood bark so predators can't see them. Deception, disguise, and outright lies wherever you look. Sales and marketing departments employ professional liars, and business is the art of making money out of lying. But all of these things serve one end - survival. The lie is the engine of survival, and in life, it is indispensable.

So does truth have any value at all? It has limited value in life, although we have laws and legal constructs such as guarantees and warranties, so our lying doesn't get out-of-hand. Even so - the lie is pervasive in all aspects of life - even the most personal and intimate. Truth is only of value in your inner world. People whose inner lives are infected with widespread lying either go insane or are very unhappy. Of course, people do lie to themselves - pretending to be enthusiastic when they are not, pretending to be calm when they are like a boiling cauldron inside. But most people do have at least a

smidgen of inner honesty. There is a stark contrast between the value of the lie in life and within oneself. In life, it is essential; within oneself, it is poison, and only a person with inner honesty has any chance of inner peace.

Definition of a new age person - someone who is generally ignorant of science and philosophy, but is happy to proclaim with certainty on the most difficult questions.

It could well be that the new-age movement has done more to damage the general intelligence of the human race than anything else in its history (except religion). Human beings dislike the uncertainty of not knowing, so they invent all kinds of clap-trap to relieve themselves of the tension. But there is another, darker-motive behind the superstitions and pseudo-science characteristic of the new-age movement. New age people want stuff - material stuff, money, good health, sensory titillation, wild experiences, relief from worry - and so on. For these reasons, "The Secret" (think of something, and it will happen - for those unfamiliar) found fertile ground among the new-age community. So it is precisely those people who want stuff the most who are keenest to latch on to any old nonsense that promises the goodies without any effort whatsoever on their part. Not only do new-age people have all the answers, but it seems they also represent the more grasping segment of the population.

Don't tell your "friends" of your good fortune - they'll hate you for it.

Envy and resentment make the world go round. If we could see the secret resentments people wrap in pink ribbons, and do their best to disguise, the world would look unbearably ugly. The most extreme form of this behavior is schadenfreude - delight in other people's misfortune. So, if you have a bit of a win on the lottery, don't tell anyone - they will hate you and be solicitous at the same time - even Satan himself can't bear to see such behavior. The reason people flinch at the good fortune of others is simple enough to understand. Since the world, and specifically, human life, is a competition for resources, you might see someone else's good fortune as a threat - they suddenly have more resources and power than you do. Remember - when you are weaker, others are stronger, and when you are stronger, others are weaker. This rule is the law of the beast - and we are all beasts under the polite manners and charming exterior.

But this is just the tip of the "resentment" iceberg. It doesn't do to display your happiness either if, indeed, you are happy - people will hate you for that too. The majority of people are bitter and resentful because they believed in life and life crapped all over them. So any display of power (and happiness is a power) will probably be met with inner resentment - how dare you be happy?

Even the most refined emotions expressed in polite company are nothing more than attempts to dominate, dismiss, boast, and achieve some level of superiority.

It's quite well known that the more a person dislikes you, the more effusive they will be with their greetings - loud proclamations, painted smiles, aggressive handshakes, over attentiveness. But this is just the stuff of "normal" social interaction - and what is that saying? Most socializing is just a power play - look at what I've got or have done, it's much better than what you've got or done. I can't be alone in having to listen to "friends" blabbing about their vacation to Peru, and how fucking wonderful the whole thing was, how it was life-changing, and all this while they play Peruvian pan-pipe music in the background. They have been transformed in a way you cannot possibly be. And don't let's restrict this behavior to the desperate professional classes who have everything other than happiness, oh no, we can include those new-age seekers in this too. A genuine social exchange where each party wishes the other well and wants to hear what they have to say is rarer than the proverbial rocking horse shit. You may never encounter it. Everyone wants to talk and boast, and no one wants to listen.

If you don't want your " friends" to think you are a weirdo then for fucks sake don't try and say anything even remotely intelligent - like, "you are going to die".

Some advice: when chatting with your mates, you will be on safe ground if you restrict your conversation to topics such as fashion, travel, home improvement, football, work, motor cars, cosmetics, breast implants, bone cancer, animal slaughter, death ... Oops, got a bit carried away there - cross out the last three. I guess you already know that people are in deep denial about the realities of life, and they will not thank you for reminding them. So polite social conversation should always be centered around trivial issues - Justin Bieber's new hairstyle, a new rejuvenating face cream, your holiday pics, beer, your latest restaurant discovery, that person you both know whose partner is cheating on them - and so on. You will lose "friends" very quickly if you talk about anything real - it will scare the shit out of them, and they will hate you for it. You will be labeled weirdo, and in former times you would have been burned at the stake. Today you will just be socially isolated, and if you are injured in a traffic accident, no one will come to your aid, and your doctor will over-prescribe your medicines to put you out of your misery. Who knows, society might just create special places for people like you who want to deal with reality - far away from a general population busy indulging their narcissism on Facebook, watching porno, taking their antidepressants and anxiety

medication, deep in resentment and sadness, but optimistic about the future all the same because someone told them to be - and above all they wouldn't want to be weird.

What do you want? Whatever it is, it will be making you miserable.

You've been programmed to want stuff; after all, if you didn't want stuff, there would be no engine to fuel the economy. The problem is that wanting stuff is a feeling of lack, and it isn't as if we want a few simple things - we want lots of things - better motor, a bigger house, smarter phone, more "friends" on Facebook, more sexual partners, more money, more fame, more excitement. No wonder we feel empty inside. With all that wanting, the feeling of lack that goes with it is going to be quite palpable. So it might be useful to do a little bit of introspecting and take stock of what you want -the things you believe will make your life better because this wanting will be making you miserable. Worse still, if you are a spiritual person, your wants may be even more severe - enlightenment, bliss, peace, moksha, and so your misery will be all that more profound. Unfortunately, we are bombarded with messages every day that tell us what to want, and the people behind these messages are smart - they know what will get you drooling. So we have to be equally sharp. We have to understand ourselves and the world and figure out how we are being

manipulated. Or we can join the crowd climbing over each other on Black Friday to get that discounted TV - oh, did you trample someone to death in the process - not to worry at least you got the TV so you can flick through eight hundred channels, every one of them crap.

If you are unhappy, it is because your most treasured values have no value. At a societal level, people are unhappy because the values of society have no value.

Our values are all fucked up - individually and those of society. Most of the values we have will have been adopted - taken from the primary influencers in our life - parents, teachers, maybe peers, religion, self-help nonsense - and so on. There is an excellent chance that none of these values in any way reflect our preferences and desires. You might have had the mantra of "hard work brings success" drilled into you as a child, but not feel the least bit inclined to work hard. In many societies, it is quite okay to work for a few weeks, planting a crop, harvesting, or whatever, and then spend a couple of months loafing around. In any case, the person that has swallowed the "work hard" mantra may be unhappy because it is not the least bit in tune with their real desires. And so we have millions of people behaving in ways and adopting values that are alien to their real nature. As for society as a whole - well, we could be considering a lunatic asylum. Optimism is the great cancer, the value set that drives people on to destroy themselves for the sake of

a few trinkets - a nicer car, a larger home, a better smartphone. Little wonder that one in sixteen people in the west is on antidepressants or anxiety medication. If you want to be happy, you have to create your own value set - consciously. Unless it is a conscious act, the creeping cancer of societal values, or of those around you who want to influence you will take hold, and you will join the millions of others who live a miserable life that is alien to their real nature.

Self-importance and misery go hand-in-hand.

Yes - you are a very important person. The way you look is important, what you say is important, how much you own is important, the people you know are important, what you think, feel and do are important, and even the way you take a dump is important. Now, when you were a child, and happy, you had no real notion of importance. You were glad to play in mud, show yours if the other showed theirs, stare at clouds for half an hour, and do nasty little things to the neighbor's cat. But now everything is a burden and designed not to please yourself, but others. The way you look is an attempt to impress other people, as is the way you talk, the way you walk, how you eat, where you eat, and even the strenuous efforts to suck in a fart when its release would be greeted with disapproval. You poor thing weighed down with considerations of what other people will think - no wonder you are miserable. But hey, your misery can be alleviated for a few minutes at least if you

buy that twenty-four carrot gold, diamond-encrusted, oh so swanky watch you saw in that magazine for important people. What was it called now - oh yes, “How To Piss People Off”. At least you know that you are making yourself miserable for a good reason when you can piss others off with your new swanky watch. Isn't that why you bought it?

Yesterday I read twenty wise sayings. Today I have forgotten them all.

Let me invent a few memes - you know the sort that appears on Facebook - posted by people who want to impress you with their righteousness. Here goes - "In the depths of your despair, love will flower." Or how about - "As you shower the world with your love, so you will be showered with love." I think you might agree that the last one is the most offensive, and hopefully they are not referring to “Golden Showers”. Who do these people think they are? They make the fatal mistake of thinking that the world wants their sickly sweet "love" - narcissistic self-adulation more like. In any case, if you are into this kind of thing you might read a hundred of these every day, each providing just a minute or so of self-preening pleasure. But then you forget them and go back to spitting venom at the neighbor who has just won on the lottery. It doesn't matter how wise (or otherwise) the sayings are; you will forget all of them in the same way you will forget what you read on your packet of breakfast cereals in the morning. We could

aspire to more sophisticated memes - ones that sound like they come from a zen teacher. How about - "empty your mind and be filled with the world." - or other similar bullshit. Some people even compete on the level of the exclusiveness of their memes, quoting from Buddhist scriptures or Sanskrit texts. The underlying assumption here is that if it is old, it must be profound. Either way, no matter how exclusive the memes, they will all be forgotten within ten minutes of reading them.

No one is more dangerous than someone who has found God.

This one hardly needs any explanation. Millions have died in the name of religion, and the person who has found God is usually convinced of the certainty of their claim - and there is nothing more dangerous than certainty. Someone who is certain will not meet half-way, or agree to disagree, they will want to press their claim until the end, and that end may be war or murder. In reality, it is not only people who have found God; it is anyone who makes their claims with certainty that should be avoided. Human beings are in no position to acquire absolute knowledge - knowledge of the ultimate reality behind the fact there is something rather than nothing. But the low tolerance most people have for not knowing means they will be attracted to certainty like a moth to a flame, and there are plenty of people selling certainty - for a price.

Order is Death

You must have seen those features in glossy magazines showing someone sat in an unbelievably neat, sterile lounge trying to portray a picture of worldly bliss. Typically it shows a woman reading some moronic magazine; since having got the perfectly ordered domestic setup, that is all that is left. What it doesn't show, of course, is the striving, cheating, and desperate ambition to acquire such boredom - since a perfectly ordered life is a boring life. When you take it to the extreme, order is death. In a perfectly ordered environment, nothing new can happen - how could it? For something new, there has to be a break with the existing order. This principle not only applies to naive dreams of perfect materialistic orderliness, but most organizations can commit suicide by striving for perfect order. The completely efficient business does not have room for change - the change would disrupt its efficiency. At the time of writing, it would seem that the German automobile industry is suffering from the "order is death" syndrome. Being perfectly efficient, it had no room to accommodate the rapidly growing market for electric vehicles - and cheating on exhaust fumes doesn't help either. If you want to know death, then get your life organized to the last minute - a living death is guaranteed.

Nothing serves as well as obscurity to make shallowness look profound.

How to become a spiritual guru in one easy move - write some obscure texts. That's it. There is a large class of people who believe that anything ancient or mysterious must be right. To make your texts obscure, all you need do is talk in terms of allegory and metaphor - the seekers of the extraordinary will love it. So instead of saying "water flows downhill," you can say "the great invisible substance flows from the higher regions to the lower regions." Fans of this kind of material can have a wonderful time with it. "The great invisible substance" becomes spirit - or some other nonsense. The "higher regions" and the "lower region" become states of being. And with a bit of wiseacring, this could all be interpreted as those possessed of the great invisible substance move from the high regions of spiritual awareness to the lower regions in the act of benevolence. That should keep their desperate little egos happy for a while. Numerous modern authors have done very well from obscurity, and have become particularly adept at bastardizing science as part of their cause. Such terms as "quantum healing", "quantum consciousness", "multidimensional awareness", are routinely used to give the impression of scientific legitimacy. But the bullseye is to discover obscure ancient texts, which might have meant something in their day (and equally might not have), and create some mysterious cult out of them. It is usually the

case that the more obscure something is, the more shallow it is. As Einstein said - if you can't explain something simply, you don't understand it well enough. Happily, we are blessed with a rational mind, that when put to task, it can ferret out bluster and bullshit. However, for those too lazy to use their rational mind, obscurity will continue to make shallowness look profound.

Perfection is total acceptance of the fact that you are a chaotic, fucked up, mess.

There is a contradiction here - but it can't be helped. In conventional terms, a "chaotic, fucked up, mess" is not perfection. Let's drop the convention. If you happened to be the only human being on planet Earth, it seems very unlikely that you would evaluate or judge yourself at all. What would you be comparing yourself with? - and that is the nub of it. We only think we are aberrant or lacking in some way when we compare ourselves with others like ourselves. You wouldn't compare yourself with a hamster unless you were in a very objective sense truly fucked up. You will compare yourself with those around you - peers, coworkers, family.

The central problem is that the comparisons are thrust upon us through advertising, social media, peer group comments, family poisons. Oh yes - family is the worst of the lot. It doesn't matter how skilled your parents are; they

will fuck you up. Either you will do everything wrong, or every time you tie your shoelaces, you will be applauded for being so talented. The result is that you either think you are a useless piece of shit or that the sun shines out of your rear-end - respectively - either way, you are fucked up.

There is a way out fo this labyrinth. Just accept that you are a chaotic, fucked up mess - really accept it. Life can create nothing else but chaotic, fucked up, messes - to be such is normal. And there lies your perfection - total acceptance of what you are. It may be that your fuckedupness is different from others around you - but that doesn't matter. If they think your fuckedupness is in some way inferior to theirs, tell them, ever so politely, to go fuck themselves.

Pretending to listen, to be interested when I don't want to listen, and when nothing is interesting - that is hell itself.

Here is the reality of much social interaction - you are boring someone, or they are boring you. You don't want to listen to the nonsense of others, and others do not want to listen to your nonsense. Even so, we socialize because we are social animals - well, most people are. Those who are not are blessed indeed. But it's considered polite to feign an expression of interest, to laugh on cue, to respond appropriately. The big problem is that social norms dictate the issues that can be discussed, and nearly all of them are

tedious - home, sport, fashion - whatever. We all play the game because we don't want to appear weird. Ultimately it's pretty much all boring. As a result, we pay the price - all the phony interest, phony smiles, fake everything, is all draining. We find ourselves in hell itself - a place where everything is phony, and nothing is real and spontaneous. Not all social interaction is like this, but the chattering classes suffer the most. They want to chatter and typically do not want to listen - some sympathy is needed. Their self-esteem is based on how many chattering parties they can go to, the level of triviality they can attain, and ultimately how much they can boast - albeit ever so politely. Satan himself left his habitation on planet Earth because of this - even he cannot bear to listen to the tedious crap most people come out with in their attempts to gain oneupmanship.

Resentment makes the world go round.

It may not be immediately apparent, but resentment drives much of the activity in the world, and even sets the moral tone. Resentment is easy to understand - when someone displays more power than you, you may resent them. After all, you want that power - money, status, fame, possessions, and if you can't get them, then resentment is almost a dead certainty. Nietzsche was huge on the whole thing of resentment and even claimed that it shaped our morality. The powerful can afford to be complacent, but the underdog becomes devious and a master of lying and

cheating. Since the underdogs resent the powerful, they create a value set that negates the claims of the powerful. A good example is the Christian church with its humility, charity, chastity, modesty - all directly opposed to the power possessors of the day. But the craft and scheming of the church eventually won out, and so its value set was adopted (by everyone other than the church it would seem).

Resentful people will try harder and become more devious to achieve what they want. Resentment is the ultimate motivator, and it is also an extremely destructive force. It is not uncommon to find people who have lived frugally, for example, to be resentful of those who do not. Any censoring of our instincts and desires will result in resentment toward those who do not censor. Parents who have censored their natural spontaneity will resent children who do not.

In many western countries today, we find people weighed down with duty and responsibility. Their work is unrewarding; they live a timetabled life - they are slaves. As a result, we see a set of moral values that is centered on productivity, optimism, effort, and those who do not conform are today's "sinners" - the unemployed and sick. And so it is clear to see that resentment will always make the world go round, even though the values that come from resentment are forever changing.

The universe is amoral, knowing neither good nor evil. Morality is a human affair and is always defined by the power possessors.

Religions would have it that there are absolutes of good and evil. Most people grow up with some level of religious or societal input to their notions of good and evil, and these become very deep-rooted. Take theft; for example - every religion has something to say about the immorality of theft. But let's assume you are starving, and you "steal" some bread from the bakery. It happens to save your life and allows you to help some other people. Was the theft wrong in that circumstance? Where do we draw the line? Is the artificial price hiking of drugs that save lives a form of theft? When we look around us, it would seem that the universe is amoral - the notion of morality is nowhere to be found. The world does have laws - you cannot walk through a wall, for example, but Stalin could massacre twenty million people. So clearly, the laws of the universe do not prohibit massacre. The notion of morality is a purely human affair - nature knows nothing of the concept. Without legislation to guide behavior and deter through punishment, we would have murder, rape, theft, and any other kind of violence occurring as an everyday affair. The resulting laws in a society tend to be reflected in the dominant morality. Since it is the power-possessors of the day who determine the law, so they also determine

morality. We live in an amoral universe, but morality is a tool that is used to establish some measure of order in society.

By saying something is beautiful you instantly kill its beauty.

It was William Blake who suggested we "kiss a joy as it flies " - if we don't want to destroy it. The very moment we conceptualize an experience we kill it. Isn't it enough to experience beauty without trying to capture it in the fetid bird nets of conceptualized thoughts? Unfortunately the fetid bird nets are proliferating, mainly in the form of social media. It isn't enough to experience a tasty meal, we now have to post photos of the dishes on Facebook or Instagram - the pleasure of the meal is forgotten in the desperate desire to gain approval from others - that is where the pleasure has now become located. Neither is it enough to see some attractive vista - we kill it by taking photographs and posting on social media, boring everyone who claims to be a friend, but is actually a fellow braggadocio. The pleasures get lost and our attention moves to the anticipation of hundreds of likes on social platforms specifically designed for narcissists. Children are gifted with the ability to simply experience pleasures without trying to capture them - for now at least anyway. But the poison of social media will invade even their

innocent little lives - and when it does, as it surely will, something very precious will have been lost.

The people who would sell you "free will" are the very ones who want to condemn you.

The question of whether you have free will or not hinges on your attitude to cause and effect. If you see no evidence for cause and effect (kick a ball, and it moves, for example), then you can believe whatever you wish - kick a ball, and it stays where it is maybe. If, however, you are not delusional and see plenty of evidence for cause and effect, then two more options are available. Either you believe that human beings are as much a part of the universe as anything else and as such subject to causality, or you think that the world made a special exemption for human beings, and we operate according to different laws. If you accept the first case, that we are an integral part of the universe, then you cannot believe in free will - we are determined to act in the same way anything else is. In other words, everything we do has a cause. However, if you think we are somehow separate from the rest of the world, then you can believe in whatever you wish - including free will. It has been stated very nicely by a few people (including Einstein) as "you can go what you want, but you cannot want what you want."

Having said all this, if we have no free will, then neither can there be any praise or blame - we do what we do because

it was the only thing we were ever going to do. The Church was very keen for us to believe that we had free will. In this way, we could be labeled "sinners" and live our lives under a cloud of blame. Now and then it would pick someone who was not a sinner and call them a saint - the ones who were praised. The only people who would be keen to promote the idea of free will are those who get a kick from apportioning blame to others and putting people like themselves on a pedestal of praise.

It might all be illusion and lies but the illusion and lies exist. Existence itself is the only truth.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

Be silent you know nothing.

Here we are trapped inside our senses and thought structures, and we flatter ourselves that we can know "reality" or "the truth". The fact that our brain constructs our so-called reality seems to be generally overlooked - and there is no way out of the simulation it creates. Even space and time are constructs of our mind, as are cause and effect and the fact we see the world comprised of objects. And as far as truth is concerned, it should already be apparent that we cannot know absolute truths if we cannot know reality. The sciences are merely a study of how our minds represent reality - a survey of our simulation. This doesn't detract from the fact that we can know a great deal about the simulation itself - I know how to tie my shoelaces, for example - but knowledge beyond my senses and mental structures is impossible. So - be silent, you know nothing (that matters).

Emptiness is full of possibilities. Fullness is empty of possibility.

It's like one of those cute "zen" type statements - the kind that sounds profound but means absolutely nothing. But this one does say something. Have you ever noticed that people who might be classed as "know-it-alls" are generally the most unhelpful option to turn to when we need some hard facts? The problem with "know-it-alls" is that since they already know everything, they never actually learn anything, and so their bullshit and bluster is just that - and it's wholly useless. People who consider themselves experts have no room for anything new - they're already full of nonsense. This cute "zen" type statement is particularly applicable to people who think they have the world and their existence all sorted out. The fact we can know nothing of real substance seems to have been unnoticed by them. So when the world doesn't behave according to their understanding, they get grumpy and resentful - and utterly incapable of learning from experience. To be inwardly empty is unbearable for most people, and so they fill themselves with all kinds of bullshit. But for someone who can live with an awareness of their total ignorance, there is plenty of room for new information. The problem is that nature "abhors a vacuum." and since we are a part of life, we behave the same way. It requires a conscious effort to remain empty and not let our inner state be filled with all

kinds of nonsense. The payoff is that life becomes more spontaneous and exciting - emptiness is full of possibilities.

I once knew a man who meditated for two hours every day over thirty years. I asked him what he had achieved. "Nothing - it was a complete success. "- he replied.

Meditation isn't a wholly futile activity, but to do it with the expectation of turning your miserable, meaningless life into a perfect rose garden is delusional. It has been said by many zen teachers (real ones, not the ones selling you images of a perfectly calm life) that to meditate to achieve something is just a waste of your time - although it has to be said that time was invented to be wasted. In any case, the promises of bliss and endless joy are just snake oil, and we shouldn't forget that this is big business with millions of people willing to spend large amounts of their hard-earned money to realize the claims of the snake oil salesmen. If you want to meditate, do it because you like it, and not because you feel you have some divine duty to fulfill, or because you expect to be delivered from your misery. If you can meditate for two hours a day over thirty years and achieve absolutely nothing, you can be assured that your practice has been of the highest possible quality a human being can attain. Anything else is just second rate, and the time might have been spent more wisely watching 1950's sci-fi movies.

The awakened man - lust with intelligence.

Do you think the caged animal within you is happy? It's pacing backward and forward in the tiny space it is given, rubbing itself against the bars and creating bleeding sores. The obvious question to ask is, why did you cage your beast in the first place? What do you object to so strongly? All it wants to do is play, eat, fuck, and lay around. Ah, but playing and lazing around have no economic value, do they? And so the bars of the cage starts to appear - no playing or loafing about. Your real emotions also become wholly unacceptable - your hatred, resentments, envy, anger, and so the bars become higher and the space in the cage smaller. Well, we can't let a wild animal roam around, can we? In essence, the answer to the question is yes we can. Human beings also happen to be endowed with reason, and as the word might suggest, we can, with know-how, learn to treat our beast well and play the part of a responsible member of society (but it is just playing a part - never ever strive to be a good member of society). The doctrines that would say we have to whip the beast into submission are doctrines of cruelty, and in any case, if you kill the beast, you kill yourself. With intelligence, we can give the beast a good time. It will be happy and leave us free to pursue things other than sex, food, revenge, power - and so on. Such is the awakened man. He is awake to his beast, and he is awake to his intelligence. Lust with intelligence is awakening.

If you can observe it, you are not it.

You are not a teapot, although ingestion of certain substances might bring such a belief about. You are not any of the things your sensory apparatus presents to you - smells, sounds, sights, taste, touch. It gets a bit trickier when we get to the body. A toenail clipping, although once part of your body, is not you. Even when attached to your body, it would be a folly to say, "that is me." But where there is a connection via the nervous system, we are much more inclined to say, "this is me." Most would probably consider a hand to be part of them, although in reality, a hand is just another object but with the particular property that it is connected via the nervous system. The rest of the body can be treated in the same way - it is an object connected via a nervous system, so it's a bit special, but it is still not you. We come to emotions - surely they are part of what we are. Well, not really, emotions can be observed like anything else and are sensed in the body. We might think emotions are in mind, but it is only the associated thoughts about something that has caused an emotion that is in mind. The bottom line is that we can observe emotional states in the same way we can watch anything else. Finally, we come to thoughts. And yes, thoughts can be seen too, although they have a habit of hiding when we try to look at them. Even so, with a bit of practice, we can observe thoughts. Sensations, body, emotions, thoughts, and desires can all be observed - they are phenomena. So what is left? Well, clearly, there is something that can

observe, but what that thing is, we will never know because if we could observe it, we would not be that either. If you can observe it, you are not it.

The greatest freedom you can know is the realization of your complete insignificance.

Being something insignificant comes with a host of benefits. It means nothing you do is the least bit important. In a universe with four trillion galaxies, each with one hundred billion stars, it doesn't matter whether anyone likes your latest Facebook post. And it doesn't matter to the universe whether you wear shorts or jeans today, or even whether you make it to the end of the day. You could say - well, these things matter to me - and there is the rub. As soon as you think you are important and significant, so everything you do and everything that happens to you becomes critical. You can't have it both ways. If you want to be free, you need to feel your insignificance and that of the things that happen to you.

On the other hand, if you want to indulge in the illusion that you are the center of the universe, you will pay the price - constant anxiety because everything has become so desperately important. But there is an awful reality to all of this. When we believe we are important - in whose eyes are we important? I'm afraid it might boil down to just one person - yourself. True enough, you may have some people

close to you who feel you are important, but that's about it - the rest of the universe does not care. Depending on your attitude toward the world not caring, you will either be devastated or joyful beyond measure.

Is it not enough to sit and experience existence? Or does the whining baby in your head keep you fully occupied? If it does, then give it your attention, and eventually, it will stop whining and leave you free to simply sit and be.

Your whining baby - it never gives you peace. Life sucks, climate change, environmental disaster, economic depression, the stinging remarks other people made, your regrets, the stinging remarks you made, your crappy partner, your crappy job. I don't need to go on. So your whining baby will occupy itself with these things all day, and maybe even at night. It whines because generally speaking, it is not being listened to - and so it goes on and on. Give your whining baby some time, and some understanding, and slowly but surely it will stop whining and be quiet. This leaves you free to sit and experience your existence - something that surprisingly few people do - because they have a whining baby that consumes all their attention.

Contrary to popular opinion existing is superior to living. You have to exist before you can live, and as such, it is the

bedrock of your life. Living tends to involve a lot of noise, and so we don’t find time to sit and experience our existence - which is a shame since existence is real. In contrast, living is mostly imagination and frantic activity.

Your knowing is like a swarm of maggots, all it will leave is the bones.

Science has become a religion for many people - it conveniently fills in the blanks that most cannot tolerate. Nature does abhor a vacuum after all. The fact that the world we know is a simulation created by the mind is almost wholly overlooked, although some forward-thinking scientists such as Douglas Hofmann are sticking their necks out to broadcast the message. So, if we cannot know the real world, but only our simulation, then what do we know? We know stuff about the simulation - science is a study of our simulation - the way our minds represent reality - but we don't know anything about reality itself, and of particular importance is the fact that we do not know what we are either. Our pretense of knowledge strips life of its mystery, leaving nothing more than hard materialism - the crassest and stupidest of all religions. The problem here is that most of us hate "don't know" and the appetite for understanding the nature of our situation is even rarer. This allows the peddlers of certainty to fill our heads with their dogma, and it is a fact that most people will be happy with doctrine, leaving them free to pursue their futile ambitions.

It might all be illusion and lies but the illusion and lies exist. Existence itself is the only truth.

The governing law of survival is the lie. People lie to each other and themselves. Businesses lie to each other and their customers. Politicians lie, spiritual people lie, animals lie through deception, and even plants deceive (the Venus flytrap, for example). On top of the deliberate lie is the illusory nature of existence. It is as though life lies to us through our senses. Railroad tracks do not meet in the distance, the moon is not really in a lake when we see it reflected, and a stick does not bend when we put it in water, even though it appears to. Thunder doesn't happen several seconds after the lightning flash, and sugar isn't sweet - sweetness is something our brains invent. There is nothing we can point at and say, "this is true." Our reality is the product of our mind in any case, and so we have no grasp on "reality" - whatever that might be. But here is something real in a world of lies and illusion - lies and illusions exist. Existence itself is the only truth.

Only zero is sanity. Zero expectations, opinions, desires, ambitions.

Scientists believe that the total energy in the universe is - zero. I say believe: it's much more than a belief, the numbers show it to be true to a high degree of accuracy.

The best kind of human life is also zero since you might have noticed that every up is accompanied by a down - and vice versa. On first impressions, you might doubt this, but lottery winners might serve as a good example. After the euphoria of a big win and no doubt a period of buying everything the heart could desire, most of them end up miserable, depressed, and in some cases, commit suicide. If you experience an "up," you would be well advised to anticipate a "down" - at least you can prepare for it. To have zero expectations is a wise move too. An expectation is a pleasure stolen before the event, and when the occasion arrives, it tends not to meet expectations. Indeed the hope can ruin an otherwise entirely satisfactory experience. Zero opinions mean you can avoid the pain of seeing your best-loved ideas proven wrong, and zero ambition means you can never be disappointed. It would be a rare human being who could live like this, but there are degrees. If you want to avoid the most frightening dips in the roller-coaster of life, then it might be as well to reign in your efforts to experience the highest leaks. And there is a problem associated with climbing ever higher peaks of expectation, opinion, and ambition - the next summit has to be higher, and what satisfied last time will be seen as a non-event next time. The problem is that as the peaks get higher, so will the troughs. Only zero is sanity.

The highest practice is not meditation, chanting, philosophizing, self remembering, or any other fabricated practice. The highest practice is to be whatever you happen to be right here and now.

Oh, it sounds so simple to be whatever you happen to be right here and now - but it isn't. For a start, we are always telling ourselves bullshit stories about how we should be - and "should" is such an evil word. Instead of being bored senseless by someone you consider to be important, you convince yourself that what is being said is meaningful and exciting. Or maybe you go to a swanky restaurant where the food is actually pretty awful, but because you are paying two hundred dollars, you tell yourself it is delicious. These lies we tell ourselves even extend to our "spiritual practices ". Maybe we tell ourselves that we a kind and loving when we feel spiteful and vindictive. The so-called negative emotions are wrong - or so we've been told, and we are very naughty indeed if we see them in ourselves. It's just another form of lying to oneself. There is a constant theme here. This inability to be honest about our inner state comes from self-judgment. We've been told what internal states are good and which ones are bad. As a result, we judge them quite automatically. Meditation, chanting, philosophizing, and the rest are not going to help. The highest practice (which is really no practice at all) is to have enough self-knowledge and inner honesty to be whatever you happen to be right here and now. It means

having the courage to acknowledge all those thoughts and emotions that you were told are evil. If you feel spiteful, then be spite - it doesn't mean you have to unleash your spite on an unsuspecting world, but it does mean you get to live a real inner life instead of one that is a constant source of internal conflict. Any form of self-censoring will result in unhappiness you can do without. In any case the censoring comes entirely from the things you have been told and read. You have allowed external authorities to become judge and jury and allow them to condemn your inner states. Tell them to go to hell.

It is the seeking that takes us away from the very thing being sought.

The industry that serves people seeking meaning, purpose, satisfaction is enormous. You could look at almost everything as a means of trying to satisfy this need - sport, entertainment, ambitions, material goods, romantic materialism (travel), spiritual pursuits, sex, food, religion, relationships. Some seeking is seen as more sophisticated than other efforts, but in the end, it's all seeking. Sure enough, many people come to realize that the usual trappings - money, fame, sensual pleasure - don't cut it. And let's not be too self-righteous here. If you don't have money, you will probably die, and the body certainly needs some level of sensual pleasure - food and sex particularly. But to embark on a quest in the belief that more and more

of these things will bring satisfaction is folly - it doesn't work. So, the search moves on from material things to "spiritual" things - meditation, mantras, devotion, distinctive dress, spiritual scriptures. But there is a common error in both the crass worldly and the spiritual seeking - both believe there is something outside oneself that can satisfy. And so the seeking takes us away from ourselves, focusing on anything from the next football game, to the next chakra cleanse. What people are seeking is sat on their face - which is why they can't see it. Come back to yourself and sink into the fullness of existence - your existence. It sounds simple enough, but the monkey mind is always looking for novelty, and the emotions tend to be activated by the least little thing, so sinking into the fullness of one's existence requires that we calm the emotions and the mind as best we can. For such calming, a great deal of knowledge is needed. It simply isn't enough to sit in zazen while an inner resentment is bubbling away because that person over there is getting more attention from the zen teacher than you are. The thing that is being sought, although most people do not realize it, is to experience their existence as fully as possible. Seeking is the thing that takes us all away from this state - the only one that will satisfy.

Does a tree exist when no one is looking at it? You will never know.

The answer to this question is way more complicated than might first appear. Philosophers have argued for millennia in attempts to reach a solution, and it would seem that the answer is unknown. We establish the reality of something through our experience of it - if there is no experience, then as far as we are concerned, a thing does not exist. It can, of course, be argued that because an item does not exist for us, this does not imply it does not exist at all. So, let's do a thought experiment. We see a tree in a forest, and we are the only ones looking at it. As soon as we walk away from the tree and can no longer see it, then it ceases to exist for any sentient creature, and as such no longer exists. But, you might argue, I know it continues to exist because when I look back at it, the tree is once again there. Well, it's there when you look back, but that is not the point. The whole argument becomes even more tortuous when we consider that it is our brain that creates this simulation called reality - the only things we can know are those created in the brain's simulation. If no brains are simulating an object, then it does not exist. From a common-sense point of view, there is no way to establish whether an object exists when there are no observers of it.

The Devil's Work

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Unacknowledgements

For Anal Retentive Types – yes there are typos, grammatical errors, and maybe more. If you had paid a single cent for this you would have room for complaint. But since you didn't, please do not bother me with the details. For everyone else – I hope you enjoy this attempt to destroy your inner calm.

Preface

If you listen carefully you can sometimes hear God's laughter. It's a faint 'ho ho ho' echoing around the universe. He just cannot believe his luck; a species of sentient beings, situated in the direst of circumstances, that pretends it's having a good time. I am of course speaking of Homo Sapiens and our endless capacity for fooling ourselves. Here is a secret. If you dare look reality straight in the face you too will be able to join God, and laugh at the cosmic joke. You will become happy – not that happiness is a goal worth pursuing in its own right. Denial is the source of nearly all misery. While our imagination desperately conjures up happy ever after stories, life ruthlessly rips them down. If you do the ripping down yourself, you will derive pleasure from a sense of your own inner honesty and power.

This series of short essays will do some of the ripping down for you, but the main task is yours. Read Ligotti, Ernest Becker, Schopehauer, Emil Cioran and others if you develop a taste for the destruction of your most dearly held beliefs. And remember - the most powerful person on Earth is the one who has nothing to lose.

Is Life OK?

In his book The Conspiracy Against the Human Race, Thomas Ligotti asks whether life is OK. His answer is a resounding no. A variety of others agree with him including Emil Cioran and Schopenhauer. In the opposite corner, we have the people who not only think it is OK but believe it is something to be celebrated. Leibniz and Spinoza come to prominence here. Leibniz is famous for saying that this is the best of all possible worlds and Spinoza harps on about the perfection of the world and its creator. So which group is correct?

The realists such as Schopenhauer only see futility. In Schopenhauer's case, he saw a single unconscionable and unconscious force called the will-to-life manifesting through all things. It is rapacious and seems to place no value on individual beings since it sentences them to death the minute they are born. It does, however, seem to appreciate the continuation of the species very highly, as the sex drive is indeed tyrannical. It would be hard to argue against Schopenhauer since he is merely stating the facts - everything dies, but the sex drive ensures a species continues.

The optimists on the other hand call upon a supernatural being and Spinoza was quite clear that he saw mundane life as vain and futile. So he just diverted his attention to a being that was infinite and eternal, namely God. Leibniz was also infatuated with God and didn't give much attention to life itself. All of this makes sense since it would be challenging for someone to conclude that life was OK without actually turning a blind eye and focusing on

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the supernatural. And if we wanted to be particularly unkind we could accuse the likes of Spinoza and Leibniz of living in their imagination.

This does raise an interesting question, however. I think we all know that life is not OK. The Buddhists probably nail it best. We are born, suffer, grow old and die. We are aware this. It is not a point up for debate. So can we just accept this and then create our fantasy world to our liking. In Ecclesiastes. Solomon expresses his despair at not being able to find anything that is satisfying. He states that the fate of the wise man and the beast is the same - death. In the end, he only advises that people find something they enjoy and just get on with it. Well, this is a nice theory, but once a person has seen the emptiness of life they can't pretend that playing the guitar, praying to a God, or even hedonism will fill the gap. But there is a twist.

For a person who has enough self-honesty to see the futility of life, the study of this futility becomes a pleasure - or rather I should say, it can become a joy. Such activity reminds me of a slightly subversive statement Spinoza made in his Ethics. He said 'insofar as we understand God to be the cause of pain, we to that extent feel pleasure.' I've listed Spinoza with the optimists, but he was a strange kind of optimist. He knew that life involved pain, but found a way to make understanding pain give him pleasure. That quote from Spinoza is profound. For him, God was not a benign, caring force. God was Nature, and Nature was ruthless.

So here is a way out of the conundrum. Life is vain and futile, to quote Spinoza, but by understanding its vanities and futility, we can derive pleasure. Something quite heretical is implied here, and not least the fact that human understanding can trump the suffering caused by God.

This is where the realist comes out victorious. By staring the brutality and futility of reality in the face, and by understanding it and how it affects us, we can transcend it and derive a sort of pleasure from the understanding. The optimist will always be in denial and as such will always suffer, simply because they will always be disappointed.

Apparently, it requires a certain inner strength to walk the path of the realist, and the help of those who have been there. Fortunately, we have Schopenhauer, Cioran and even Nietzsche to assist us on our way. And oddly enough I would put Spinoza in this camp. He's a dodgy character, and the real message he is giving takes some digging out.

The realists hold the keys to heaven - our heaven. But to reach heaven, we have to walk through Hell. Many get stuck in Hell, but the knowledge that even Hell can be understood, and as such be a source of pleasure, can serve as the escape door.

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The Perpetual Graveyard

The Stoics would say that every cup of earth contained some part of a dead human being - some matter that once was part of a body. Not only do we find ourselves in a graveyard, but we see all the creatures that will soon become part of it. This graveyard recycles itself over and over again, with a smooth, ruthless efficiency most of us would rather not contemplate.

Hungry ghosts, demons, zombies and vampires haunt this graveyard world. The hungry ghosts forever in search of something that will fill the void within them, and demons bringing cruelty and suffering to fellow creatures, with humans being the most demonic of them all. Zombies are the walking dead, running entirely on automatic, and incapable of joy. Vampires are people who suck the life out of others with their narcissistic demands and psychopathic behavior.

Most people make the graveyard tolerable by denying its existence. They focus entirely on their ambitions - fame, money, power, sexual conquest, luxury and endless forms of competitive behavior - no matter how subtle. To pursue these aims, human society manifests as one large competitive game, and to hell with the losers. This game is all-consuming, ensuring that the eye never sees the ultimate futility of it all. And meanwhile, the graveyard is recycled - the real outcome of all sentient activity. It doesn't matter how rarified or esoteric human activity becomes, the result is always the same - as Solomon expressed in his despair in Ecclesiastes.

The central issue is this. The second a creature is conceived it is sentenced to death. This sentence is the value nature puts upon each life. We are almost worthless as far as life is concerned, with one exception. Procreation ensures the continuance of the species, and to this end, the sex drive is all powerful. The graveyard must keep recycling, for reasons that are not at all clear. And maybe it is best that we do not know, and that nature has blinkered humanity so that it pursues its futile ambitions.

Life has quite openly given its opinion of your worth - you will breed and then you will die. This honesty that nature has expressed is a gift. It tells us how to form an attitude toward our life. Ultimately we are not important as individual creatures, and that is our liberation. While the survival instinct drives us remorselessly onward, tying us up with endless concerns and worries, we need to step back and realize that the will-to-life serves itself and not us as individual creatures.

That we are not important, means we can, as best as possible, arrange our lives, so it is not all about serving the great beast - the graveyard that recycles. We can rest peacefully in the cemetery when we shed all sense of self-importance, all feeling of ambition, all illusions of gain, and sit back and watch the circus that is both within and outside us. Life has passed its verdict on us as individuals - we are almost worthless. We, in turn, can give our opinion on life - apart from the primary effort to maintain our existence; we should make efforts to reduce our pains and increase our pleasures - Epicurus would approve of this. While we all ultimately serve the great beast, a few can to some extent make the sentence more or less pleasurable.

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The Human Zoo

The desire motivating all creatures is the desire to persist in their existence - or the survival instinct. The ferocity of this ability is the result of millions of years of natural selection, where those creatures with the most aggressive survival behavior are the ones that win the battle. Homo Sapiens isn't the dominant form of humanoid because it is the most intelligent, it demolished the competition because it has the most aggressive survival instinct. So it would be fair to conclude that the population of the planet consists of those species that are particularly nasty, and man, as the most successful species, takes first prize. The flaw in the survival dynamic is that it must ultimately destroy the species it promotes to number one position. Members of this species must inevitably start destroying each other, their environment and other species - as is indeed the case. Is there any hope that man can tame his aggression? No. Nature hasn't fine-tuned this destroyer species for millions of years just to have it modify its behavior on a whim.

So having established that man, like all creatures, is driven primarily by the desire to exist, we can start to expose the myriad emotions that are in turn powered by this desire. The principle that determines whether an emotion is pleasurable or painful is whether survival is enhanced or diminished respectively. This mechanism does not account for every emotion, but we will come to those later.

Pleasurable feelings will greet enhanced survival prospects. Receiving a significant amount of money, overcoming an illness, finding an attractive and fit mate, getting a promotion, or any one of a vast number of life-enhancing events will generate pleasurable feelings. There is, however, a twist in all of this. Survival is a competitive sport. If your competition becomes stronger, it means you become weaker, and if you become weaker, your competition becomes stronger. So, you will not only experience pleasurable emotions if you become stronger, but you will also experience them if the competition (almost everyone else) becomes weaker.

Painful emotions will accompany diminished survival prospects. Illness, getting fired, divorce, a car accident and many other events will create a sense of diminished wellbeing, and with it a painful emotion. However, we can also experience painful emotions if our competition (most of the people around us) becomes stronger. This strength will make us feel weaker. So, your situation at work may remain unchanged, but one of your peers gets a significant promotion. As a result, you will feel diminished just because someone around you has become more powerful.

These issues can be clarified by the following five laws of the Human Zoo:

1. Every person is driven to survive and will do almost anything to ensure their ongoing existence.
2. An enhanced sense of survival will create pleasurable emotions.
3. A diminished sense of survival will create painful emotions.
4. When those around a person become weaker, that person will feel stronger and experience pleasurable emotions.

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5. When those around a person become stronger, that person will feel weaker and experience painful emotions.

The analysis that drops out of these dynamics is quite amazing. Let's look at envy, a painful emotion that is felt when someone else is on the receiving end of good fortune. If your neighbor suddenly comes into a large inheritance and moves to a more prestigious neighborhood, it would be quite natural to experience envy. In fact, envy is not only feeling pain at someone's good fortune but also feeling pleasure at their ill fortune. This latter is often called schadenfreude - pleasure at another's misfortune. Naturally, we are keen to see this sort of behavior in others and more reluctant to see it in ourselves. But the five laws are just that - laws. We are all subject to them, and they work like clockwork. They are just as much a part of the natural world as the law of gravity.

If someone makes a person feel more powerful and sense an enhanced state of existence, then that person will love the other person. If someone makes a person feel less powerful and diminishes their existence, then that person will hate the other person. It's clockwork and nothing more.

These dynamics create the human zoo - people continually sizing up their survival prospects and making comparisons with the competition. Much of the processing is unconscious, but sometimes it is conscious. Social intercourse is often nothing more than people sizing up to each other, which is why some find it so exhausting. And because human beings group behind abstractions such as political party, religion, football team, corporation and so on, they will indulge in the same dynamics at the group level. Hence wars, religious persecution, industrial sabotage and other niceties are inevitable.

So how do we step out of this zoo, and the inevitable suffering it creates. The first step is gaining a thorough understanding of the dynamics, and then we can watch it like we might watch chimps in a zoo. The battles for mating rights, group leadership, feeding priorities and all the rest of it. It is possible to reach a state where human behavior can be observed objectively without any associated judgment or emotions, but such a person will have studiously watched the same dynamics taking place within them and applied the same non-judgment and understanding.

Some emotions are not directly associated with the survival power play. Gaining an understanding of the emotions and the underlying dynamics is pleasurable in its own right. And any activity that is not directly serving survival can bring pleasures that are in no way related to the usual comparative power struggles. Playing a musical instrument, art and many other aesthetic pursuits can generate such pleasure.

Stepping out of the zoo is not a physical movement, but a psychological one. Participation becomes one of watching the power plays, which are sometimes amusing, and other times tragic. Either way, once the dynamics are understood the resulting behavior loses its sting and we can move on to other things.

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The Lie

Lying and deceit are essential activities for most living creatures. The all-powerful desire to exist means every sentient being will attempt to maximize its survival prospects through the lie. A lie may be as simple as the spider's web, which is so subtle that it goes unnoticed by the fly until it collides with it. Or the moth that takes on the color and shape of a leaf to avoid being seen by birds. Very explicit deceit is displayed by the anglerfish, dangling a protuberance from the top of its head that looks like food to other fish. When a fish attempts to swallow this bait, it is then eaten in turn by the angler fish. The whole of nature exploits the lie to perfection, and best of all in man. In fact, nature is built on the lie.

Some psychologists claim that human language became sophisticated so we could lie more efficiently. Lying manifests in every aspect of life. To protect ourselves against it to some extent we have created a large set of laws, and an equally significant legal profession to go with it. Lying is de rigueur for most business activities. In fact, we have created a unique function so that companies can lie more efficiently to customers. It is called sales and marketing. And another function was created at the beginning of the twentieth century so that organizations of all kinds could lie to the world as a whole. A whole new industry was created called public relations. Such is the power and effectiveness of the lie that many businesses spend more on sales, marketing, and PR than they do on developing their products. And of course, it is not just businesses that lie. Governments lie much all the time, and lying is quite common in academia, medical professions and every area of human activity. The lie is the stuff of life.

Lying also manifests in close personal relationships. In the human mating ritual, both male and female will employ charm to seduce the other. As Nassim Taleb pointed out, charm is just an inoffensive way of causing someone harm. People use charm to fool someone into giving when that person would not give under normal circumstances - and so it is a form of lying. A significant proportion (typically around 35%) of people who are married will cheat on their partners. The raw biology looks something like this. Males want to distribute their sperm as widely as possible and feel constrained in a monogamous relationship. Females typically want the best quality sperm from the fittest most virile male. With these drivers, it is hardly surprising that fidelity in marriage is difficult to achieve. This does point to a broader issue. Human beings are essentially animals with a self-conscious, rational bit added. It's a formula for inner conflict and much lying. In our natural state, without a conditioned consciousness telling us what is right and wrong, we would rape, murder and steal without a second thought. This happens in the animal kingdom all the time. But, since we have created societies with laws and codes of conduct, we have to push our natural instincts into the background. The natural result is that we lie to ourselves about how we feel. When our natural urge is to be violent, we instead display politeness, and might even feign affection or amusement. Society is a lie, but a vital lie if we are not to degenerate into barbaric behavior. The brutish within society may find barbarism attractive, but they wouldn't feel that way when there is no one to fix their car, or remove a tooth, or rid them of a flea infestation.

Society as lie bridges the gap between lying to others and lying to oneself; the latter of these being the most destructive form of lying. So dominating is our social conditioning that

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we have lost contact with our real emotional state, and it is worth pointing out that our emotional response to a situation is always our authentic response. In a situation where someone has said something that hurt us we may pretend to ourselves that we are OK and everything is fine. Or when someone angers us we pretend that we are calm and collected. Childhood conditioning will determine to a large extent how close we are to our real feelings. If a child is disciplined every time it displays some form of anger, it will inevitably learn to suppress that anger and lose contact with it. This is all a recipe for significant internal suffering. The solution, of course, is to regain contact with the emotions via some form of therapy. The problem here is that those who are in most denial about their real feelings are those least likely to seek help. It is entirely possible for an adult to have emotional authenticity without laying waste to the social environment around them, and so the inner lie is not necessary.

A healthy attitude toward the lie would be to accept that most of one's interaction with the world will be based on lies. From the fake smile through to serious fraud, the lie is the currency of life. However, when it comes to our internal state, we need to avoid the lie as much as possible. Being unauthentic with ourselves results in various neuroses and sub-optimal behavior. A person who tells herself that her business is turning a corner when in reality it is flat on its back is merely indulging in unfounded hope and will squander resources on something that cannot be brought back to life. Emotional authenticity with oneself requires a good deal of courage, but we either suffer from the inevitable neuroses caused by the inner lie, or we suffer the discomfort often felt when being honest with ourselves. One is unconscious and the other conscious. As for the world out there, give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.

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Against God

Driving the universe is a small number of natural forces - gravity, electrical and magnetic forces, and nuclear forces mainly. Where life is concerned, there is one dominant force, and it is called the survival instinct. This ability ensures that each creature makes every effort it can to persist in its existence and that only those species which measure highest on the survival scale thrive. The characteristics that ensure survival is primarily physical strength and cunning. Lions excel in the first of these and human beings in the latter. We, Homo Sapiens, are the most cunning and deceitful of all species - this is how we eliminated other human species (Neanderthal for example) and rose to dominance.

If we understand the idea of God to mean ‘all there is,' then God seems mostly unconscious and mechanical - as far as we can tell. Of course, we could postulate a God that manifests other, more esoteric forms of consciousness, but we have no knowledge of this, and so it would just be speculation. We will keep away from speculation. Those who have experienced cosmic consciousness will not need this book. Sticking out like a sore thumb is the fact that human beings have a reflective consciousness. We can create ideas and concepts, play around with them and use them for our ends. Even the smartest of animals sit near to zero on this scale compared with man. So man is something of an anomaly.

This force called the survival instinct is wholly blind - as blind as gravity or magnetism. Since creatures need to eat each other to survive, nature as a whole is red in tooth and claw. Man is no longer prey for lions and other flesh eaters, but being the most aggressive and cunning of all creatures the survival instinct still operates at full throttle. And so man turns this blind instinct against himself. One individual will seek to dominate and exploit other people, and if we assume for the moment that man has not restrained this instinct through creating a State with laws, then men will murder each other for the slightest offense. When the law has broken down in various cities and countries, it is common to see rape, looting, killings and even cannibalism. Invading armies, when there are no restraints, will murder, rape and pillage.

So let’s go back to the idea of God for a moment. This massive machine called the Universe, or Nature drives life on Earth through the survival instinct. The effort to survive is the force of God on Earth. While we can look on at the carnival of carnage called life with some degree of detachment, it becomes harder to do that when the impact of the survival drive is much closer to home. Most people would not wish to live in a lawless State. The idea that those who are stronger can, on a whim, simply murder, rape, or steal from those who are weaker, is not very appealing. And so man creates laws and a State to protect himself from the natural instincts associated with the survival instinct. The State is against God. It tames the drive that is foremost in all men and obliges each to give a minimum of consideration to others. There is, of course, a price to be paid - frustration, anger, resentment and other emotions cannot be avoided when our core driver is inhibited. Yes, of course, you would like to ram that car in front that has just cut in, and you will feel frustrated because you cannot. The penalty for doing such a thing would be greater than the pleasure that is gained, and so most of us would just suck it up.

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An unrestrained survival drive would result in daily carnage on a massive scale in every town and city. While we can inhibit this behavior by laws, penalties, and societal pressure, there are no such laws that apply to the devastation the survival drive creates every day within each person. Because man can imagine the future, he is capable of imagining his death. Obviously, this is at odds with the survival instinct, and so it creates a neurosis. Most people repress thoughts about their mortality, and as a result, the neurosis intensifies and sometimes leads to severe mental illness - not least depression and heightened states of anxiety. Our survival instinct is also the origin of many desires - for sex, food, power, fame, wealth - and so on. In human beings, this drive seeks expression in whatever way it can, and since it is no longer acceptable to murder a couple of people every day, the survival drive finds expression in displays of power - money and fame primarily. All of this is the inevitable result of the survival drive manifesting in millions of human beings who have given up their natural right to murder, rape, and theft. So envy, hatred, jealousy, contempt, lust and a thousand other emotions remain impotent and repressed.

We can work against the survival instinct, this power of God manifesting in life, by getting to understand it. Unfortunately, many drivers would inhibit a person from being honest about their desires and emotions - religion and accepted social norms being the most obvious. But with enough self-honesty, a person can admit that she would like to punch that person who has just sneaked in front of her in a queue. Once we have self-honesty, we can then learn to observe how we feel, just as we might watch some external event. Eventually, we might be able to sit with an emotional state such as envy, hatred, lust, derision, and just enjoy the energy. This sounds simple but is very difficult. Such work is work against God, in a sense, since we are using this prime driver called the survival instinct for our purposes - to understand and to use the energy. Nature or God, does ensure however that the majority of humanity will simply be slaves to the emotions that are generated by the survival drive. It does, after all, want the fittest, most cunning and least conscionable members of our species to be successful, and only the gladiatorial trial of life will establish this.

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An Anomaly

Dog eat dog - this is nature's modus operandi. Life is not shy and reveals its brutal reality for anyone who has eyes to see. The will-to-life, manifesting in every creature, means that each will put its own needs first. Every being will kill to satisfy hunger, fight to the death for mating rights, or seek to dominate others for its advantage. It's a straightforward and efficient mechanism for ensuring the strong become stronger and the weak are eliminated. Since action reveals intent, it would be fair to conclude that nature strives toward for diversity and strength at any cost. The individual is not important, only the never-ending refinement of power through a process of natural selection.

In most respects, man obeys the ruthless dynamics of the strong dominating the weak - but not altogether. While all abstractions such as nation, religion, corporation, political ideology and so on, provide mechanisms for one group to dominate another, there are a few people who find such herd behavior abhorrent. They also find a great deal of personal interaction distasteful - the bragging, one-upmanship, disguised aggression, envy and so on. How can this be if nature rules supreme? Why would someone avoid the competitive scrum with the real possibility of disadvantaging themselves? What sentiment within some people finds the brutality of the will-to-life repugnant?

It would seem that the mind of man does not entirely belong to nature. As far as life is concerned, domination of the weak, theft, trickery, brutality and survival at all costs are the only forms of behavior we need consider. There is no evidence that the dynamics which drive life on Earth are anything other than a local phenomenon - a local insanity. The solution to this anomaly is not evident. However, if we look solely at the facts, we find some members of the most highly evolved species on planet Earth are turning their backs on the very dynamics which brought them into being. Is this the inevitable outcome of an unopposed force reaching the zenith of its powers? Every extreme implies its opposite, and it seems quite likely that this unconscionable will-to-life is exhausting its brutality through man. Of course, this unthinking, unconscious force may bring about its destruction through nuclear war or environmental disaster - although the word 'destruction' is perhaps too strong since primitive life would once again commence the struggle to realize more sophisticated and aggressive species.

This new phenomenon, of a mind that rejects the forces that brought it into being, is truly an anomaly. Whether it has any future remains to be seen.

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The Five Fools

We are all fools, and fools come in five flavors. The foolish fool believes in life and is wholly driven by it. The emotional, intellectual and physical fools don't believe in life, but they do think they can build a superstructure on top of life using their most potent power. The zero fool doesn't believe in life, and she doesn't believe in herself either. Let's look at the fools in detail:

The Foolish Fool

Life is OK. The foolish fool (FF) gets a job, a partner, family, drives a nice car, and takes a two-week vacation every year. If the FF lives an average sort of life, then she may get worn down by job pressures, the mortgage, and the kids, but overall it's all worth it. But as the FF gets older and health issues start to rear their ugly head, so she might reflect now and then and wonder what it is all about. Then as the FF gets older still, so she gets glimpses of the grim reaper, and thoughts about what could have been, the missed opportunities, the way it all passed so quickly, and people she knows start dropping like flies. Having invested everything she had in life she has nothing left for herself, and as Gurdjieff points out, those who do not plant seeds when they are young having nothing to reap when they get older. She gets older, but not wiser, and as the compelling fascinations drop away, so there is nothing left, only a hollowed out shell desperately seeking meaning. The time that could have been spent acquiring wisdom was dedicated to life - because she believed in life.

The Emotional Fool

Having figured out at a relatively young age that investing everything in life is a fool's game, the emotional fool (EF) seeks some higher meaning. Such effort is driven by the taste for more rarefied emotional states and the pleasures associated with them. The whole of life can become centered on practices that result in these states, and like a junkie, the EF can feel deprived if they are not accessible. Accompanying this quest for pleasant emotions, the EF is easily conned by people uttering comforting, reassuring words. There is a distinct lack of intellectual discrimination, and the EF can be easily carried away by group hysteria and wishful thinking. As the end of life approaches the EF realizes he has nothing substantial within him - no real understanding, just emotional states that hold so much promise, but never deliver anything real. Even though the EF did not believe in life, he made the critical mistake of believing in the emotions.

The Intellectual Fool

The intellectual fool (IF) looks at life and just sees futility and chaos, and for this reason, she does not believe in life. The IF believes in systems, and the more intricate and complicated the better. Alchemy, cosmological systems, ancient knowledge, philosophical systems, and theology are all up for grabs as far as the IF is concerned. Order above everything else is demanded from these systems. They have to bring clarity in a confused world because the IF just cannot tolerate the idea that maybe the world is chaotic and random. The IF will endlessly debate the meaning of every word in a system while missing the fact that the whole structure might be good for nothing but the trash can. Intense divisions can occur

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between those who believe a particular word means one thing and those who think it means another. Dogma, persecution, bigotry and other niceties are often the direct children of the IF as he looks to create an intellectual fortress with no weaknesses. Late in life, the IF may become overwhelmed by the futility and emptiness of his sterile intellectual creations. Something aches within him and his systems become too much of an abomination to bare. He has tried to straitjacket life, and life has ripped him apart. The IF never believed in life, but he did believe in the power of thought - and all thought did was build a prison.

The Physical Fool

The physical fool (PF) is not deceived by life for one minute; she is just too aware of the inevitable decay of the body and the march toward death. And so the PF sets out to preserve the body as much as possible - yoga, diet, the gym, supplements, wheat grass, various quack therapies, relaxation - and so on. This awareness of the inevitability of old age and death is usually subconscious. The PF is actually in denial about death and aging, and this creates a deep neurosis. They fool themselves that they are embracing life when in reality they are running away from death. So while the PF is not deceived by life, the realization is unconscious. These people often lack emotional and intellectual intelligence, and so they are game for any scam merchants selling the latest elixir of life. As they grow older, so their denial becomes deeper. This manifests in need for constant activity and an inability to sit quietly in their own company. In the end, they see their life for what it is - a shallow worship of the body and a futile attempt to stop the clock. The PF never believed in life, and in reality was horrified by it. But they did believe in the power of their body, ultimately paying a high price for investing in a rotting bag of flesh.

The Zero Fool

The zero fool (ZF) does not believe in life, and he does not believe in his powers - physical, emotional and intellectual. She sees these abilities as tools for breaking down, instead of building up. Whereas the emotional fool will seek emotional experience, the ZF will attempt to understand the emotions, and through understanding become less influenced by them. The ZF has no tolerance of systems or intellectual baggage. Metaphysical systems, religious dogma, and philosophical speculation are given no room to grow. The ZF hunts down ideas and concepts that are without foundation - ideas such as purpose, morality, meaning, spiritual, and others that might just be nothing more than imagination are seen for what they are - chimera. As far as the body is concerned, the ZF knows he is dying and that the facts show that death will not be cheated by excessive attention to diet, exercise, and other fetishes. The ZF takes delight in becoming less and abhors the expert, the devotee, the fools who think that life is a process of accumulating when it is a matter of shedding. The body does not lie - the whole of life is the slow process of the body becoming less - of dying. The ZF wants his entire being to move to zero and delights in it. For the ZF life has far fewer thorns because he is not interested in picking roses.

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Five Freedoms

Freedom is merely the absence of constraint. Of course, constraints are always present in some form, and so freedom is always relative. The most problematical constraints are those which cause an object to clash with its environment in some way. A motor vehicle that is constrained to travel at ten miles per hour will incur the wrath of other drivers, and could quite easily be the cause of an accident. A swimmer that is constrained to swim with a twenty-pound weight attached to their body will almost certainly drown. The less constrained something is, the more quickly it adapts to its environment.

The human mind is not free. It is conditioned by its inherent nature, by the environment and by the belief systems it has adopted. However, a mind that is constrained by useless ideas will lack the fluidity of movement in the same way that an overburdened human body will be slow and clumsy. In fact, an overloaded mind will be the cause of much suffering, causing it to clash with reality and initiate actions that are inept or harmful.

The five freedoms detailed below describe ideas that most of us entertain, even though they tend to be detrimental. All of them represent an attempt by the mind to establish some illusion of control. In a world we do not understand and have very little power to change, such illusions are inevitably damaging. They stop us from seeing life as it truly is and responding to it in the most appropriate and timely manner. The expression of these freedoms is negative, in the sense that we negate the ideas, and hence constraints, that burden us.

The first freedom - No Truth.

All of us tend to harbor the idea that truth exists. As with all of the mental burdens, it is an attempt to put boundaries around life so we can control it. If only we could establish some truth, it would serve as a foundation stone for the construction of an elaborate edifice, which in turn would allow us to operate more efficiently in life, and with less risk. The classic example of this is religion - a set of beliefs that form a ground for us to deal with life. That such a ground may clash with life's realities is never accepted, and so a religion may prohibit the use of contraceptives in a world that is overpopulated.

At a more trivial level, we can claim that a statement in logic is correct or that a fact is true. But this is not what we mean here by the truth. The truth most of us chase after is a set of beliefs that allow us to understand the world and our position in it. It hardly needs to be said how impossible such a quest is. Even with our sciences we still know almost nothing. Such ignorance is inevitable. The universe is almost certainly infinite in its complexity and infinite in the extent to which we do not understand it. What kind of truth can we propose in the face of the infinite?

Religion is nothing more than superstition, science nothing but curve fitting (bending ideas to fit facts) and philosophical systems nothing but fantasies built on unstable footholds. Better to see these things for what they are - human constructs developed to help finite beings exist in an infinite universe. But they are not the truth.

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Abandon truth, and we leave bigotry, inappropriate behavior, anxiety and furrowed brows behind.

The Second Freedom - No Purpose.

'Purpose' is a human invention. While we may look at bees collecting pollen or a lion bringing down a deer and infer purpose, we would be wholly mistaken. The bee does not know it is collecting pollen - it just does it according to its programming. In the same way, our liver extracts waste from the blood without any consciousness of its function. When we talk of purpose, we are referring to an idea that is conceived in our mind, and of which we are conscious.

For many people, the notion of a purposeless life is unacceptable. Again, we are not talking about purposes that serve to improve our lives. Studying for a qualification to get a better job is obviously purposeful, but does not carry the same weight as ideas that might be constructed to give our life purpose. Our lives have no purpose because the universe has no purpose - no final cause.

That the universe is without purpose is quite evident. For it to have a purpose, it would have to be conscious in some way. It would also need to be lacking. 'Purpose' is only an expression of lack. If the universe is all, how could it possibly have an idea of something that is lacking and outside itself?

People construct purposes because they feel a lack. This lack usually comes from a sense of inner emptiness. And so, we see the religions attempting to address this lack through promises of immortality, a loving God and attributing significance to human life. New age cults do pretty much the same thing with affirmations that we are love and spirit embedded in the flesh.

To have no purpose is to be free. People who indulge in purpose are restricted in their thinking and behavior. It is an unnecessary burden.

The Third Freedom - No Free Will

The common notion of free will is that we are free to choose when presented with alternatives. So imagine you are walking past an ice cream parlor. Do you buy an ice cream? Well, you like ice cream, but yesterday you were reading a book about the evils of sugar, and so you decide not to buy one. So was the act of not buying a free act? If you had not read the book about sugar, you would probably have bought an ice cream. On that basis, it wasn't an act of free will. It was wholly conditioned by your state at the time, and whether you had or had not read the book. We have the illusion of free will because we are aware of the decisions we make, but not of the reasons we make the decisions.

Modern neuroscience can clarify here. It has found that in many circumstances the brain decides on an action several minutes before the person acts out the decision. It was all in the subconscious before the decision became conscious.

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There is a vanity associated with the notion of free will. We act as if we are somehow cut off from the environment and are autonomous beings. Nothing is further from the truth. The environment conditions us on an ongoing basis, and this conditioning is the cause for many of our actions. We would probably not buy an ice cream on a day when it was snowing, just to give a clear example.

While we may simply be automatons in many respects, we can condition the decisions we make by changing our understanding. Reading the book about the evils of sugar will probably influence our decision on whether to buy the ice cream or not. However, we only push the decision back a level. What is it that makes us read the book? Again, this will be wholly determined by other factors. Even so, the principle remains true. As our understanding changes, so will our decisions based on that knowledge.

Realizing we have no free will is significant. Most people reject the idea because it challenges their belief that they are in control. But recognizing we are wholly conditioned beings, and that we have no free will is very liberating. Remorse and regret are no longer valid, and neither is praise. The implication of this is a topic in its own right, but the fact remains - we have no free will. So, ditch free will and become free.

The Fourth Freedom - No Importance

Since every creature, and particularly human beings, see themselves as the center of the universe, there is a naturally assumed sense of self-importance. Unfortunately, the rest of the world does not share this sentiment. Most sentient creatures see others almost as inanimate objects. Watch a lion chewing on the organs of a gazelle while it is still alive. There are no visible signs of any empathy whatsoever, and whether the gazelle is dead or alive while being devoured seems to be irrelevant to the consuming lion. And so it is with human beings to some extent. While each suffers their trials and tribulations, deals with their existential angst, and may hurt deeply, to another person any particular individual just assumes the importance of an object to a large extent. Of course, if we have some form of relationship with another person, then their inner state becomes better known to us. Generally speaking, we treat all strangers as objects and reserve the sense of sentience for ourselves and those who are close to us.

We can work outwards when determining how important we are. One's own body, thoughts, and emotions are very, very important. They fill our world. To those who are close to us, we are less important than they are to themselves, but even so, we do assume some importance. Then we move further out to casual friends and acquaintances. In reality, we may not be the least bit important to these people. Moving further out to individuals who live in the same town or city we are virtually invisible. So, we don't have to go very far to lose all significance whatsoever. The same applies to so-called 'famous people.' While the population of the world may know a very famous person, such a person will not be missed if they suddenly disappear. And certainly, and beings living in the Andromeda galaxy will be blissfully unaware of the extinction of all life on planet Earth.

But this is just a consideration of the size of the universe and the number of things in it. How about time? We all have a window of around 70 or 80 years to live our lives, and in that

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window, we can be relevant to a small group of people. Now the universe is about 13 billion years old - that's 13 with nine zeroes after it. Within a hundred years of your death, you will be almost entirely forgotten - it will be as if you had not lived. Even the Sun and our galaxy, the Milky Way, are not necessary. In two billion years the Sun will explode, and the Milky Way will collide with the Andromeda galaxy. It will be fireworks on a massive scale, and only God gets a front row seat to see it. I call that selfishness on an infinite scale. So your selfishness can never add up to much. In fact, it's zero to be precise, even if you are a narcissistic psychopath.

This universe is without doubt very very large - some 100 billion stars in each galaxy, and four trillion galaxies. And to make matters worse, it seems as though there is an infinite number of universes - called the multiverse. So for all intents and purposes, existence is infinite in time and space. Divide any finite number by infinity, and you get zero. So you and I are zero. Even our whole galaxy is zero.

We would like our lives to have meaning and purpose. But how can zero have meaning or purpose? This thought will either depress you or free you. That you and I are not necessary components in the infinity of existence means our actions are wholly meaningless, and so within the limits of the law we can think and do what the hell we want. It doesn't matter. We don't matter. Again, this thought either depresses or liberates.

Let us imagine for a moment that we are very, very important. This state implies that we have some crucial role to fulfill, and this, in turn, implies responsibility. I want no responsibility for something I do not understand. Give me zero any day. Zero allows me to be irresponsible - again within the limits of the law and any considerations for others we may wish to entertain.

The more important you are, the less free you are. Choose zero and breathe in that fresh breeze of being insignificant. Your ego may object, but just tell it there is a choice - importance with all the associated responsibilities, or zero with inner freedom. Even our clutching little egos must surely understand it is better to be nothing than something.

The Fifth Freedom - No Moral Code

Most of us have a strong tendency to assume that life comes with a moral code - particularly human life. We don't need to dwell for very long at all on animal behavior to realize that any notion of a moral code is simply ridiculous. Might is right much of the time, and when it isn't then trickery and deceit are usually to be found. Human beings entertain the vanity that they might be governed by a loftier set of laws than animals, but evidence would suggest that if there were any inherent moral code, ours would be laxer.

Religious proclamations such as love your neighbor, and do unto others as you would have them do to you, seem to have been largely ignored, even though most people would approve of such statements. This is where the spirit is willing but the flesh weak, and since we are mostly flesh, so we are governed by the survival instinct to the exclusion of almost everything else. The effort to survive manifests in many ways - from simple physical violence to the most intricate plotting and scheming. The subtler the aggression, the more hypocrisy

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will accompany it. Those who claim moral superiority are usually those who exhibit greatest self-interest.

The bottom line is that nature does not come with a moral code built into it. It's every creature for itself, and to hell with everything else. Watch a crowd piling into a store on Black Friday, and such behavior will be evident. In this respect, animals are a lost cause. They will continue to rip each other to bits for eternity. However, man has the possibility of employing reason to make life more tolerable. The creation of a State with laws presents the opportunity for man to live life with freedom from fear and the satisfaction that transgressions will be punished. Such a State introduces the notion that people fare better if they assist each other to some extent. Such laws are the only moral law that exists since left to our own devices we would be tearing each other apart for the least offense or insult. While nature prohibits a man walking through a wall, or a brick falling upwards when it is released, it does not inhibit Stalin, Hitler or any other despot from murdering millions of people. If humanity is going to thrive in a sustainable way he needs to create his laws using reason.

Just as there is no moral law embedded within nature, neither is their justice and punishment and reward. It is often said that the wicked prosper - and sometimes they do. But so do people who are not viewed as wicked. Nature is only concerned with the continuance of the species - morals are a purely human affair.

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To Be or Not To Be

Just a cursory look at the dominant 'spiritual,' self-help, philosophical and religious doctrines suggests greed for existence and an abhorrence of non-existence. Most meditation practices are geared toward greater clarity and intensity of consciousness and are in essence, just another form of materialism – if I make some particular effort I can get more of the thing I am striving to gain. Self-help books tend to emphasize a 'happier' life, and through various affirmations, a person can convince themselves they feel differently from how they feel. This sort of thing is very dangerous – neurosis is a given, and worse as the difference between reality and imagination widens.

Without laboring the point, we can summarize various approaches to life in the following way:

- Spiritual work – hopes for more consciousness, a happier life, and possibly immortality.
- Self-help – hopes for more comfortable life, greater affluence and all the life-affirming things.
- Philosophies – with some notable exceptions (Schopenhauer, Cioran, etc.) most theories attempt to convince us that God exists, that there is order in the universe, and that rationalism helps us deal more efficiently with life.
- Religions – bringers of comfort, in the sense that uncertainties are addressed, suffering is given a purpose and promises of life after the death of the body.

It seems we are all desperate to affirm our significance and acquire more of this thing called existence – at just about any price. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your viewpoint, there is another side to the reality coin – and it is called non-existence. Our existence (and life) bias is relatively easy to understand. Since we are a product of nature, we inherit the survival instinct – the desire to persist in our existence. It drives pretty much everything, and so it should not be so surprising to find it driving so-called spiritual, religious and philosophical matters. In reality, there is nothing particularly elevated about activities which are primarily concerned with a longer and more pleasurable life. Dedicating oneself to making money will do this, and will probably be more efficient at delivering the goods.

When we come to consider non-existence, it all becomes more difficult. There have been almost no thinkers who have enlightened us on this topic. Buddhism is perhaps the most useful with its statement that all of our misery comes from the wish to exist. Fortunately, most of us experience some level of non-existence every night, in deep dreamless sleep. And this does highlight the point that non-existence is synonymous with unconsciousness. This, in turn, is a property of the subject. Stuff may still exist, as our bodies do during dreamless sleep, but if the subject is denied objects, then there is no consciousness.

To balance the scales, and to offset our frantic obsession with existence, it is worth recognizing that periods of non-existence (unconsciousness) are also precious. There is a duality, and it seems likely that behind this there is neither existence nor non-existence. However, a life that is just pushed along by the will-to-life, and invests wholly in existence

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will be inherently neurotic, avoiding the inconvenient fact that existence (and consciousness) seem to come to an end at some point.

Various exercises can help restore the balance between consciousness and unconsciousness (existence and non-existence). A simple breathing meditation that focuses on the out-breath and particularly the pause at the end of the out-breath is useful. The Death or Corpse pose in yoga is also useful if, while letting the body relax, we meditate upon our extinction. Most people would not choose to do these things, but they do create more balance.

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Mirror Work

“Well then,” the Cat went on, “you see a dog growls when it’s angry, and wags it’s tail when it’s pleased. Now I growl when I’m pleased, and wag my tail when I’m angry. Therefore I’m mad.” – Cheshire Cat in through the Looking Glass

Gurdjieff famously said that human beings perceive reality topsy-turvy. Well, maybe the way to correct it is to look at the world through a looking glass, or mirror. In this way, what seems wrong when looked at directly, will seem good when looked at through the mirror. What seems painful might be pleasurable, and what seems desirable might seem undesirable. This approach is not dissimilar from Gurdjieff’s claim that every stick has two ends. If something good happens to you, it almost certainly means that something bad has happened to something or someone else. When we walk into a nice air-conditioned mall and buy a new shirt or dress at some discounted price, we can be pretty sure that the price paid was some unbearable sweatshop where kids are paid a dollar a week for working 12 hours a day.

So let’s start looking into the looking glass. Most people want inner peace, and this above all things is what many people crave. The self-help charlatans have concocted all sorts of snake oil to help us in this quest. Imported gurus from the East tell us it is all a matter of quieting the mind, and if you pay a thousand dollars or so to attend a course in mediation, then inner peace may just be a lotus position away. It doesn’t work. Or another charlatan may suggest mindfulness – being aware of what one is doing at any moment of time and attempting to keep the attention on the task at hand. It doesn’t work either. And then there are new age types who might recommend chakra healing, positive thinking, visualization, astral travel, and any other hocus-pocus that suffering humanity is suggestible enough to buy. The problem with all these approaches is that looked at through the looking glass; they go the wrong way. So here is how we might attain inner peace.

First of all, forget about inner peace. Set your focus on the inner demons that are causing all the trouble. Of course, our natural tendency is to want to annihilate them. Not possible. First of all, you need to get to know them. Such knowledge may disturb your inner conviction that you are a very kind caring person and that the demons are simply unwelcome visitors. I’ve got news for you. The demons are more you than your carefully constructed self-image that is used to convince everyone else what a thoroughly good chap or chappess you are. So making friends with your hatred, your envy, your lusts, greed, jealousies and so on might offend your ego and cause some severe distress. The alternative is to go back to the snake oil salesmen. You will find that making friends with your demons causes them to be less problematic, and in turn, you may start to experience greater inner peace. When a demon is troublesome just put your attention on it, and don’t try to dismiss it. So when your friend starts boasting about a new job promotion and the envy demon starts to breathe its fire within you just soak it up, and do not try and change it or deny it. So looked at directly the demons are something we would rather not have, but in the looking glass, they are our best friend.

Maybe the suffering of the world is an issue for you. Looked at directly we might be led to the conclusion that new age love and light is the kind of sentiment we should nurture. Not

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so, and by now I guess you might have realized that this is just avoidance. Looked at in the mirror we should head straight for the full horror that is life. Obviously, this requires a certain amount of courage and honesty. The more a person is prepared to lift all the stones and look at the horrors that lie beneath the more we become aware of feelings of compassion and sorrow. And ironically we also become conscious of the awful magnificence of the world. Gurdjieff said the world is a struggle between joy and sorrow, and so it is. You will only reconcile yourself with the nature of existence when you have dared to look it straight in the face.

There are many more examples. People who want to feel secure build a fortress around themselves, and the more brittle the fortress, the more easily it is destroyed. If you want security, become random. Become toughened to the chaotic and random nature of existence, and then your strength will be your power to deal with situations as they arise. If you want to be loved, don't try to be lovable. Just be yourself – be authentic with warts and all. People love authenticity. If you don't want to feel fear, then don't indulge in hope. If you want happiness, abandon happiness and look at what is making you unhappy.

There is one central them here. Looking through the looking glass means giving up on hopes of gratification. The dumb way to live life is to have some idea of what will satisfy and then go chasing after it. The smart way is through the looking glass. If a new luxury car is your idea of what will make you happy then go the other way. Look at that feeling of want and its cause. Joy, happiness, contentment, inner calm and so on, come on their own. All you can do is prepare the ground. Happiness that you acquire directly through your efforts will always be short lived and will invoke the opposite over time So that new luxury car will deliver some form of gratification until the novelty wears off and the next object of pleasure comes into view. Don't do it. Always look in the looking glass.

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Be Zero

Zero emotional identification and zero intellectual attachment. It sounds like it should be easy, but it isn't. Life has its hooks into your emotions and has shaped your ideas, and we all walk around with a massive amount of intellectual and emotional baggage. Zero is not concerned with trying to stop emotions, but with not buying into them. For the intellect, however, zero is all about weeding out our ideas and throwing them on a bonfire. Unlike the emotions, which are not under our control, but are a reaction to our environment, ideas are almost wholly under our control, and we can test their worth and throw them onto the bonfire of the vanities if desired.

In many religious traditions, the creation of the World is seen as an error - a move away from zero. Before manifestation, there was zero, but a tiny, almost imperceptible something disturbed zero, and matter was born. So it is with our nature. If we can rest at zero life becomes simpler, more peaceful and we experience contentment. Just a small positive or negative movement away from zero and we might find ourselves lost in the world of manifestation for years - maybe a whole lifetime.

The first step in the move back to zero (because we were once zero) is to acknowledge that plus or minus is not a desirable state. Plus might be some emotional excitement or the adoption of a new system of belief. Minus might be sadness at the death of a friend, or the realization that our positive thinking and visualizations are not delivering the goods. This is the nature of life - for every up there will be a down, and vice versa. The ups create pleasure, and the downs generate pain. Each life is zero, just as the total energy in the universe is zero. At any moment we may be full of hubris because something significant has happened on the plus side of life. But you can be assured that at a later point we will be despairing because it all looks hopeless. Such is the roller coaster of life once we have invested in it at an emotional level. Those who think they can just pick roses without being hurt by thorns are utterly delusional - and it is worth remembering that the self-help industry was created to perpetuate that delusion.

Intellectual zero is far easier to achieve than emotional zero, although it is still quite a challenge. We can examine our inventory of ideas, decide whether they serve any useful purpose, and discard them if they do not. There will be resistance since many ideas have been adopted simply to reinforce our world view. So someone may hold the idea that we will all be judged by a judgmental God after the death of the body. This approach serves absolutely no useful purpose, and can in no way be verified. It is imagination - pure and simple. It does, however, illustrate an important point. The ideas we hold in our minds are very often tied to emotions, and so intellectual cleansing cannot take place without parallel work on the emotions. The person who believes in a judgmental God may do so because they see so much injustice (or what they consider is an injustice), and can only deal with this by assuming some form of punishment for the offenders after death. And here we see another thing. Ideas are linked together, as are emotions. Notions of injustice will, in turn, generate concepts of right, wrong, punishment, and morality. Maybe you start to see how deep this labyrinth goes, and it is advisable that a person seeks the help of someone who has trodden this path of clearing out emotional attachments and intellectual baggage.

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What is striking about most spiritual, religious and self-help doctrines is that they aim to heap more emotional and intellectual garbage on top of that a person already possesses. Any efforts toward freedom and joy should always be a stripping away process. Metaphysical systems, moral systems, rituals and the like, are exactly the opposite way to the one that brings about some form of liberation. In fact, the only thing any of us can do is clear out. And the clearing out should not be done with the aim of achieving something. This would be just another item of baggage.

It is strange that achieving zero should be the most difficult thing of all. But in a way zero is against God, against the creative power that pushes everything into motion, and so it is going to be difficult. But behind the phenomenal aspect of God (or Nature) is the un-manifest - substance as the ancients would call it, the potential for existence out of which reality emerges. Be zero, be potential.

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Order is Death

The universe would appear to be born out of chaos, and eventually, establishes some form of order. Chaos accompanies the creative event, and this is inevitable since the creation of something new implies there can be no predetermined plan. Order, on the other hand, emerges as the energy of nature exhausts itself. In the physical universe, order manifests as galaxies, planetary systems and the like. But here is the reality of this process - as these structures are established, so the universe dies. There is less creative chaos and a slow drift toward zero activity. Physicists predict that the universe will become a massive ocean of sameness, and when everything is the same, there can be no energy exchange (since everything has the same energy). And when there is no energy exchange we have death. The universe will suffocate to death from sameness.

While the universe is fascinating, the way we live life is much more interesting. Sameness is the death of society and death of the individual. In a society where people all have the same interests and do pretty much the same things, there can be very little energy exchange. And so life becomes boring, dull and repetitive. At an individual level, each person is a unique creation. If a person can maintain this uniqueness and resist the forces that would homogenize, then such a person experiences a dynamic energy exchange with the environment, and particularly other people. This does not mean that people will find someone who has resisted external influences to be pleasant company. They may find such a person challenging and annoying - but at least there is an energy exchange.

The primary task ahead of someone who wants to be what they truly are, instead of how the environment would mould them, is to learn to sense and dismiss external pressures. Such a person remains alive, within the meaning that there is a unique interaction with the rest of the world. The all too common alternative is a slow living death, with sadness, depression, lethargy and boredom.

Maintaining uniqueness means rejecting all forms of inner ordering - since order is death. A person should deliberately entertain conflicting ideas, ask difficult questions, create internal confrontations which involve different drivers and ideas - in other words; they should create inner chaos. The person that has accepted dogma as a means of quieting their inner life has simply accepted death. And what is more, they will find all differences disturbing - different people, different cultures, foods, clothes, habits, beliefs - and so on. The person that has accepted the death resulting from inner order will try as far as possible to impose sameness on everyone and everything else. Think religious and ideological bigotry and persecution. However, society at large is driven in the same way. A person who does not accept that family, a job, superficial socializing, and passive acceptance of society's values, is the way to live life, will be ostracized. The sameness, the inner death that has occurred to all those around her, will seek to invade the psyche of a person to bring about completed order.

The death instinct is the instinct for order, and of course, the most ordered state for a person is physical death - no energy, no movement, and sameness with the primarily inorganic universe of matter. The ultimate end state is not just inert matter, but matter that is wholly uniform.

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The idea that order is death forms a sharp contrast with the accepted idea of a spiritual life, where people seek calmness, peace and serenity. In reality, much of what passes for spiritual life is just the death instinct at play - the acceptance of order and a capitulation to the forces of sameness.

Nothing is more important for a person who seeks life than the rejection of order. Those forces that would impose order include education, religion, societal norms, family and peer groups. For a human being, life is primarily life of the mind. It is this we must protect from sameness and order if we want to experience living fully.

A note on entropy:

The concept of entropy is one of the central ideas in theoretical physics. It can be seen as a measure of order in a system, and the idea has wide applicability in many areas of life. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that disorder, as defined by entropy, would be called order by most people. Imagine a room full of people, all with the same opinions, dress code, habits, behavior and so on. Some would see this as orderly, in much the same way we might look at a regiment of soldiers all marching together. Not so in entropic terms. This is a very low energy situation. What conversation might these people have? It would be pretty tedious, low energy drivel. Nothing much is going to happen with such a group of individuals, and entropy would say that this is a state of high disorder, with high entropy. So entropy is a measure of disorder, and sameness characterizes disorder. The opposite situation would be a room of people from diverse cultures, different mindsets, opinions and so on. A melting pot like this might produce something interesting, and there would certainly be more energy than with the group of drones we mentioned earlier. In fact, the amount of useful energy in a system is inversely proportional to its entropy. Low entropy systems have lots of useful energy. A high entropy, highly disordered system, would have almost no energy.

The natural tendency for any system is to increase in entropy - to become more uniform, more disordered in entropic terms, but more ordered in everyday language. Increasing entropy applies to civilizations, societies, families and of course individuals. At an individual level, increasing entropy means decreasing energy. There is lack of motivation because the internal mental state has been made uniform. There are no conflicting ideas, dominant ideas, drivers, resistances - and so on. Just a quiet background hum caused by inner capitulation.

Families are classic examples of increasing entropy and decreasing energy, and as everyone knows, incest is likely to produce children with physical or mental abnormalities. More generally, however, families often seek to homogenize their members - to impose fixed belief systems, biases and behaviors. The same applies to societies and civilizations - which is why they inevitably degenerate, and new civilizations are born out of chaos.

The important thing for the individual is to realize that low energy means high entropy, which in turn means an internal disorder in real terms, but a superficial order in society's terms. Resisting entropy increase requires conscious work, and an awareness of how societal norms are conditioning mindset. The barometer is activity - not running around like

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a headless chicken, but the ability to execute useful directed work. It would not be an exaggeration to say that maintaining a low level of entropy and a high level of internal chaos is our primary task.

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Imagination – Good and Bad

The starting point is to define imagination. For Spinoza, imagination consists of mental images – pictures of things with associated emotions. I can imagine that I am a spiritual savant with extraordinary powers that lend me a superiority over all other mere mortals. In fact, this is the essence of much imagination – the assumption of power that lifts me out of my reality. Ouspensky states that imagination can make a sparrow think it is an eagle soaring high in the sky. But there is a problem. We cannot mock reality – it will always bite back. So the sparrow that tries to soar like an eagle will only fall out of the sky. The spiritual savant will become more irritated by having to hold on a phone when dealing with a busy call center. After all, spiritual savants should be dispensing wisdom on blogs, videos and to their loyal followers.

There are legitimate uses for imagination, but we'll come to those later. The illegitimate use of imagination is always the assumption of power through an act of fantasy. Sometimes this happens through a whim, and at other times it is necessary. As Ernest Becker points out in his book The Denial of Death, most children are so traumatized by life that by the age of four or five they will live primarily in an imaginary world. So when we see a small child speaking with an imaginary friend, acting out some imaginary scenario, it is not something to be amused at – something cute. In reality, it is a tragedy. This behavior continues through life, and many people will continue to imagine their life is entirely different from what it is in reality. Teenagers will believe they are set to become celebrities, movie stars, great musicians, or whatever lends them the most power. Again this is a recipe for suffering. The dissonance between imagination and reality will cause disappointment, unfulfilled ambition and anxiety. Of course, someone has to become a famous movie star, but it's going to happen anyway – there is no need to indulge a fantasy. The stark reality is that most of us will jump into the hamster wheel and stay there for forty or more years. We will then be freed from it for a decade or so, often with declining health, and then die. This scenario is simply not acceptable to someone in their late teens or early twenties and as such the fantasy is necessary.

This behavior manifests in all walks of life. People who pursue 'spiritual' ambitions may imagine they converse with angels, that they are on a meaningful journey, that by imagining things they can make them happen. It all depends on the power a person wishes to assume, and what makes them feel most in control and powerful. Again if someone is living in dire circumstances, this act of imagination may be necessary for emotional survival, but it will inevitably lead to disappointment and suffering. Reality is not mocked.

The alternative to imaginative fantasy is the development of real internal power. Such power is the result of a long and challenging work, and so it is not particularly attractive. Not only this, but it will be painful; stripping away the delusions that have supported the ego in its quest for power. The main work is a vigilant observation of the desire that seeks satisfaction through imagination. These desires need to be understood and felt – not dismissed. In this way, we use the very force that would cause us to indulge fantasy for fictitious power, to build up real power within us.

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The legitimate use of imagination is far less glamorous than its illegitimate use. When vision combines with active mentation, such as an architect designing a structure, then it serves a useful purpose. Albert Einstein famously said that he considered imagination to be more important than knowledge. He used imagination in his thought experiments – part of a purposeful, directed mental activity, and not the false assumption of powers he did not possess.

Gurdjieff gives a more esoteric interpretation of the role of imagination. The situation of humanity is so dire that we need imaginative fantasy to make life tolerable. The price we pay is that we continually suffer. The fantasy is always bumping up against reality. And we also lose the opportunity to experience the awful magnificence of the universe. To quote from Pink Floyd – we've substituted a walk on part in a war with a lead role in a cage.

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Something and Nothing

I'm hoping that you will not disagree with the fact that you exist. There's something going on at least, instead of nothing . Don't you find that the fact there is something rather than nothing intriguing? By-the-way, we all experience nothing during deep dreamless sleep. That is strange too. So we could say that for some period while we are asleep, and experiencing dreamless sleep, we are nothing. We flip-flop between being something and being nothing every day. Looking at our life as a whole, it would seem we were nothing before we were born, something while we live, and then nothing again after death – although this last statement isn't something we know for definite.

To make things clearer I'm going to get a bit more technical. For any experience to take place we need a subject and an object. The subject is the thing that observes and the object is the thing observed. So when you look at a tree, it is you doing the observing, and the tree that is observed. Remove either of these and there is no experience – no sense of existence. Removing the subject is exactly the same as removing all objects, and I should add that thoughts and bodily sensations are objects too. This gets deep very quickly, but it is very important. If there are no objects there is nothing for you to experience and hence there is no experience – as in deep dreamless sleep or during anesthesia. If this sounds a little dry, just stick with it, because there are many implications. So when your nervous system shuts down at night, the world of physical objects creases to exist for you during sleep. When the system shuts down even further, there are no longer any images presenting themselves in dreams, and all objects, physical and mental, disappear. Because there are no objects there is no experience, and there is no subject. Subject an object are just two sides of the same thing – experience. You cannot get rid of one side without getting rid of the other.

Let's peel this many layered onion slowly. You are subject – the thing that experiences. You are not your thoughts, because they can be seen, and as such are objects. You are not your body, because that too can be experienced – it is an object, albeit one that you know very intimately. So what are you? You are the eye that sees. Not the physical eye of course, but the eye of consciousness for want of a better word. This tells you something very important. You cannot know what you are, because you are not an object. The eye cannot see itself. Here is a mystery, and mystery and paradox are the stuff of real understanding. Annoying isn't it. The ego really doesn't like this, but we'll have more to say about the ego later.
But then another awkward question raises its head. Where do you go when in dreamless sleep or made unconscious by other means? You no longer exist – at least as the observer that sees. Of course your body exists, but a closed down nervous system means you are not aware of it. It may also be that thoughts and images are still being produced by the brain – but again you are not aware of them. There are no objects for you, and when there is no object there is no subject. Schopenhauer states this very succinctly "That which knows all things and is known by none is the subject.".

Take five. No more subjects and objects for a while. Your life is given continuity by your memory, a non-volatile data store that presents your history every time you wake up in the morning. But it isn't just memory that gives us this feeling of continuity. When conscious I definitely have the feeling 'this is me'. Antonio Damasio is a Portuguese-American neuroscientist and university professor, who takes Spinoza's notions of mind and body very

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seriously. He claims that the brain effectively creates a map of the body, and it is this map that tells me every morning when I wake that this is me and not someone else that has awoken. The parts of the brain that perform this mapping can be damaged. In such situations a person has no sense of being someone. So our sense of continuity and identity comes from memory and a map in the brain respectively. When we become unconscious of these things, we once again do not exist, if existence is taken to be synonymous with experience.

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On Not Caring

What matters to you right now? The answer to this question will reveal what is important to you and what you care about. I should add that by the word care; I do not mean assistance and emotional empathy for other people - that is something wholly different. By care, I mean, what has got its hooks into you?

Let's look at some basics. If you are starving, this will cause you real, unavoidable pain. So will a severe disease, exposure to the elements, lack of water, and possibly lack of human company. And so it would be true to say that the fundamental dynamics of survival - food, water, shelter, community, good health - are things we care about, and we do all we can to satisfy these needs. Everything else is optional.

If someone comes to you and insults you, will you care? Say they call you a liar. Will this upset your equilibrium (if you had any in the first place)? For most people, the answer is probably going to be yes, and yet looked at superficially such an accusation does not affect a person's survival prospects. So why should they care? Well, typically they will care because being branded a liar reduces their credibility in the community they live in, and as such it does affect their survival prospects. If being called a liar enhanced a person's status, they would feel emboldened and be very happy with the label. Caring about things is always about survival, and those who are in denial about their mortality and the fact they have absolutely no significance in the vast scheme of things, will care the most - they will care about everything.

Our psychological structure does not help here. The superego is the part of us that is programmed with notions of should and shouldn't. These mainly originate from societal conditioning, and much of this programming concerns accepted modes of behaviour, and what generates approval or disapproval. Since we have to live in a society we are quite keen to obey the dictates that determine what we should and what we shouldn't do in any situation. As such we care what other people think, and modify our behaviour accordingly. This is, of course, a prison, and something that is wholly alien to our natural state. Again it reduces to behaving in a way that optimises survival prospects.

So what is needed to reach a state of not caring? Well, it's obvious really. We need to realise, deep within us, that we will die and that our life has no significance whatsoever. While this can be quite distressing for someone with a sense of self-importance, and who has repressed notions of mortality, ultimately it is liberating. If this realisation becomes firmly embedded within a person, there will be a ripple effect throughout the whole of their mindset. Will it matter if someone calls you a liar? No, you don't care what other people think because ultimately you don't hang on to the notion that you are important, and you know that death is inevitable in any case.

On the surface, this may seem like a suboptimal survival strategy, but paradoxically it enhances survival. If you do not care what people think, or what might happen to you, it is much easier to forge ahead with what is important. This may be a simpler style of living, or it might be the accumulation of wealth. It doesn't matter what the aim is; it will be much

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easier to achieve, and more pleasing when we don't give a damn about other people's opinions, certain risks, and whether we succeed or fail.

To reach such a state of not caring entails in-depth work on one's self. Understanding one's mortality and utter insignificance at the core of one's being is the result of painful, intense work requiring considerable inner strength. And again there is a paradox. Through the realization of the futility and vanity of life, we achieve an inner strength that is a source of considerable pleasure. This is very nicely summarized by Jesus Christ - "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

Action Reveals Character

It is Schopenhauer's assertion that we are manifestations of will. Spinoza said the same thing in different words – the essence of man is desire. The will-to-life that manifests in all living creatures is a force in the same way that gravity is a force. It is impersonal, absolute and unconscious. So the massive suffering it causes through the generation of billions of competing creatures is of no concern to it whatsoever.

Having said this Schopenhauer then goes on to say that the will manifests differently in every creature, and this is also true of man. The character of a person is primarily the character of the will that manifests through him or her. This is not something we choose, it is something that is determined through genetics and possibly other factors we are less aware of. And so, it is very easy to determine the character of a person – we simply observe what they do. Of course, we like to embellish our self-image, but for someone who has understood that action reveals character, there is no hiding. Obviously, it is easier to observe others than it is to observe oneself, and that very charming person who always seems to take from people is easily spotted. I say easily spotted, but most people are fooled by charm, and the flattery grabs their attention while the thief steals the goods. It reminds me of the tale of the fox and the crow (the bird that makes the most unpleasant sound of all birds). The fox saw a crow in a tree with a dead mouse in its beak. The fox said he had missed the lovely, sweet sound of the crow's song. Flattered by this the crow began to squawk, dropped the mouse, and the fox ran off with lunch.

To return to the main point – action reveals character. Ignore words, gestures, promises and anything else that is used as a decoy. Only observe action. Applying this to oneself requires unusual honesty, but it is a fountain of self-knowledge. The results can be surprising. So one who sees them-self as selfish, may find they spend a good deal of their time accommodating other people's needs and desires (not a good thing, by the way). Equally, a person who believes they are industrious may be lazy, upon examination. So, it is possible to know what you are – in great detail. Maybe too much detail.

Schopenhauer then goes on to give a brutal assessment of our value in life. We all live for a brief time and then die. Our destruction is life's verdict on our worth. Again – action reveals character. Life destroys its creatures, so we must assume it does not place any value on individual lives. It does however ensure, through the sex drive, that the species continues. The individual is worthless – nature invests in numbers. As such one can only assume that biological weight and diversity is all that matters

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THE DARK WAY

Martin Butler

WHY A DARK WAY

The Dark Way is dark because it requires that we look at those things within ourselves we would rather not look at. The way of "love and light" is usually nothing more than an ego trip, a flight of fancy into a world that is not real but gives temporary relief from the realities of life.

This way is dark because it demands we look at the "beast" that is within all of us. Only by understanding this beast in ourselves and others can we understand the world. We cannot tame the beast, destroy it, or bring it under our control in any way, because to all intents and purposes we are the beast. However through understanding we mitigate some of its harmful effects on ourselves and on others.

The reason we continue to exist is thanks to the beast. The reason we suffer is thanks to the beast. In the simplest terms the beast is the survival drive. It dominates everything and it ensures that in nearly all circumstances we will put our own interests before those of others, even when we seem not to be.

The beast is a liar, a cheat, an egoist and if circumstances dictate, it can be cruel and malicious. Not very flattering is it. Which is why most people will seek "love and light" because it means they do not have to see what they really are. So despite decades of "love and light" nothing has changed. Some would say that bigotry, cruelty, phony behavior, deceitfulness and many other delicacies have increased. As long as we avoid staring into the pit of our own being and instead deny, so nothing is going to change, either for the individual or for society as a whole.

It sounds as if the whole exercise might be an invitation to unending misery - but not so. Through understanding we diminish the effects that the beast has on our own being. We create just a small amount of separation between it and our everyday consciousness, so that we are not pulled and pushed around by its whims. And most importantly we do not deny its existence and pretend that we are kind loving people - a scenario that will only produce neurosis and unwanted side-effects (spitefulness, jealousy, sarcasm etc).

This short book is structured so that it does some scene setting and then moves on the describe how the beast operates and the harmful effects it produces. We then move on to suggest some practices that should, performed with skill, deliver us from the tyranny of the beast.

How frightful is this nature to which we belong - Aristotle

AGAINST LIFE

All creatures are driven to continue with their existence - a phenomenon known as the survival instinct. The problem with calling it an instinct is the implication that living beings are more than their desire to survive. They are not. Every aspect of all forms of life serve this desire to continue existing. Existence is its own final cause, or the reason every creature will surmount almost any obstacle to continue with its existence. Life is the ultimate addiction and there is no known cure, although nature delivers its own verdict on each life by sentencing it to death the second it is conceived. The evidence would suggest that nature does everything it can to ensure the diversity and volume of life, but has no regard for the individual. If this is accepted we can only conclude that for any given individual nature will drive it to continue with its existence, but also sentence it to death. This inbuilt conflict sets the scene for a great deal of suffering.

For all life forms apart from man there seems to be a blissful ignorance of anything other than immediate desires and their satisfaction. When an animal is feasting on another it does not experience pleasure, it is pleasure. The same when it is dying slowly from an infected wound. It is not experiencing pain, it is the pain. For man however it is different. His reflective consciousness means he can contemplate his own end, and can consciously experience suffering and pain. This reflective consciousness has proved itself to be the most successful survival mechanism nature has produced. It acts as a desire amplifier, taking the desires that are inherent in the body and amplifying them so they are satisfied. The net result is that our minds become anxious as the desires proliferate and become amplified. Anxiety is the natural state for our minds, and it ensures our survival needs are heeded and acted upon. Our minds are the slave of the body, listening to its desires and then planning and executing the best course of action to see they are satisfied.

In the human experience this means we strive to equip ourselves with the skills to thrive in life. We become educated and seek the most lucrative form of employment so we can acquire food, shelter, and a suitable nesting environment for raising children. For most people the ultimate aim of all this striving is to produce the next generation. The sex drive is so strong in the young that virtually all activity is geared toward finding sexual partners and establishing an environment for breeding. But all of this comes at a cost - continuous anxiety, with the mind striving to ensure the most viable form of survival. On top of this operational anxiety is existential anxiety - the knowledge that we will die.

Pleasure and pain are fundamental drivers. When our survival prospects are enhanced we feel pleasure, when they are diminished we feel pain. Pleasure and pain act as the navigating compass for the body - it tries to avoid pain, and strives after pleasure. In parallel with the body's pleasure and pain are corresponding thoughts. Our minds are busily conjuring up thoughts that are pleasurable and in denial about things that are painful. In this respect the mind amplifies the relatively simple needs of the body and creates fantastic images of untold wealth, rampant sexual activity, power beyond measure and widespread approval from others. In the less intelligent these images will cause untold misery, since the associated desires are insatiable. The more intelligent person may see these fantasies for what they are and try to moderate them. Only the rare individual will understand what is going on here: that the mind is simply amplifying the desires and insecurities of the body, and as such the fantasies can be ignored - or even laughed at.

Animals experience pain and distress just as human beings do. However man is unique in being able to amplify his desire for existence and reflect consciously on the dangers in life. If we are going to deal effectively with the desire amplifier called the brain, we need to get a good perspective on how it affects us, and come to understand how its excessive activity can be calmed, and as a direct result, reduce our anxieties.

However, we do need to heed a word of warning. Our survival instinct has evolved over millions of years. Mankind is demonstrably the most successful species on Earth because of its over-active brain. Every desire is amplified and will nag until met. It gives us no peace. Trying to moderate the survival drive requires skill. It is much stronger than we might first consider. If a person was to observe their thoughts throughout the day they would find they are dominated by schemes and plans to achieve what the body demands - more money, more sex, more food, greater fame and on and on. If we think we can stop this awful machine from going about its business we are very mistaken. The best we can do is moderate its anxiety producing effects so that life becomes more pleasurable. This requires skill and great understanding. Any attempt to subjugate this beast called the survival drive will be met with resistance, greater misery, and even more damaging desires.

The endless desire for wealth, fame, material comforts, sex and entertainment all come from a survival drive that is out of control. Achieving some measure of inner peace means turning a blind eye to the crass consumerism our age. It should be clear by now that the task ahead, The Dark Way, is not a trivial undertaking and has pitfalls of its own. Most religions and so called spiritual traditions tell us we should be loving, kind, compassionate, generous and exercise these and other virtues, but they make one mistake - they underestimate the power of the beast - the survival drive. The Dark Way is against life - against the ravages of the survival drive that causes so much misery. For this reason we should not expect it to be without dangers - life will always fight back.

Egoism is colossal: it towers above the world - Schopenhauer

THE SURVIVAL PROGRAM

From the minute you wake until the minute you go to sleep your survival program is running. The brain is instructed on what the body needs, and as its faithful servant it spends the waking hours busying itself with getting them. We work to earn money, and maybe to gain prestige, we shop for food, establish suitable habitation, socialize to establish a support network. Our days are filled with activities of this nature, and our brains figure out the most effective way to get what the body demands. For many people the survival program is the only program that is running and they would question any activity that is not part of this program. More reflective types might find pleasures in things that are not directly linked with survival - art, philosophy and hobbies of various kinds.

Our daily waking consciousness is what we call "I". During sleep, and particularly deep dreamless sleep, this "I" disappears. Such is the energy that is consumed by the brain in its activities, and the anxieties that are produced, that the body demands the brain rests for several hours each day. The body itself does not rest - digestion continues, as does blood circulation and the functioning of the organs. Schopenhauer understood this very well when he said:

"The brain, together with the nerves and spinal cord attached to it, is a mere fruit, a product, in fact a parasite, of the rest of the organism, in so far as it is not directly geared to the organism's inner working, but serves the purpose of self-preservation by regulating its relations with the external world."

The brain collects data from the senses, forms ideas and uses those ideas to navigate life. All the time it is doing this it is overlooked by its master - the body. If the body is hungry the brain figures out how to get food, and if the body wants sex then the brain will devise schemes of seduction. As Schopenhauer states, our brain is tasked with "regulating relations with the external world" because the body cannot do it itself.

A man will give up almost anything except his suffering - Gurdjieff

I SUFFER

What is this mysterious "I" that "spiritual" folk talk about? It's a difficult thing to locate, and yet during our waking hours we have a definite sense of "me", of being someone. That this mysterious "I" is not a permanent feature of our being is demonstrated every time we sleep, and particularly in deep dreamless sleep. Where is the cherished and much debated "I" then? It disappears and for all intents and purposes we do not exist as an "I". This rather embarrassing fact is overlooked by the "love and light" brigade, eager to find something they can hang on to to satisfy their egotistical desire for permanence.

Every night the body demands that the brain switches off for several hours. Such is the energy consumption of the brain, and its constant state of anxiety, that it needs to rest and regroup for the coming day. In deep dreamless sleep we do not suffer. We have no pain, no worries and no anxiety. Plato had something to say about this state:

"Now, if death is without all sensation, a dreamless sleep, as it were, it would be indeed a wonderful gain. For I think if anyone selected a night in which he had slept so soundly as to have no dream, and then compared this night with other nights and days of his life, and after serious consideration declared how many days and nights he had spent better and more pleasantly than this one, that not merely ordinary mortal, but the great king of Persia himself, would find these but a few in number as compared with all his other days and nights."

Our body requires that our brain establishes an "I", an ego - a sense of me. Without it we would not strive so valiantly to persist in our existence, and we would be like a ship without an anchor, wasting large amounts of time trying to establish context. And so we have memory to give us a sense of continuity, and we have a map of the body that is produced in the brain stem. When we wake in the morning we immediately know who we are. If this map becomes physically damaged a person loses a sense of self.

This famous "I" is a waking hours construct that allows us to navigate the world successfully. But because of the demands of the body this "I" suffers. It is always anxious, continually scheming and planning so that the body's needs are met. It is also inherently neurotic, since we are intelligent enough to know that all our efforts will eventually come to naught - we will die. How can we make the "I" happy, since this is our primary task?

Heaven is heartless, and treats all things as straw dogs - Lao Tsu

THE DARK WAY

If we want relief from the tyranny of the beast, the survival drive, we need to consider its mode of operation and then look at their opposites. Here is a list of several attributes we can assign to the functioning of the beast:

- Desire - Every second of our waking day is driven by desire, and the mother of all desires Is the desire to exist. If a person can watch their thoughts for just a minute they will find they are always driven by a desire, an ambition. These thoughts and the anxiety they produce give us no peace.
- Light - There is no activity without energy, and we will use the word "light" to denote all forms of energy that support activity. Most animals are active during the day busily satisfying the body's needs. Nearly all plants need sunlight to grow, and human beings generally spend their daylight hours scheming, planning, working and actively acquiring the resources they need to continue with their survival.
- Haste - Since the body's desires are inexhaustible we find ourselves constantly driven by the need to complete one task so we can move on to the next. Haste and ambition are the mark of the beast and they destroy our quality of life. We are never here - we are always working for some future goal. Life flashes past without us ever enjoying the moment.
- Activity - The beast only knows activity. The need for movement is programmed into our bodies - into every muscle fibre. So we fidget, we are restless, and some people need to work out in a gym to dispose of this restlessness.
- Noise - Activity generates noise - inner and outer. At a mundane level this might be the noise of traffic, the noise in an office, the noise of chattering birds, barking dogs. But it is the inner noise that is most damaging. The continual inner dialogue that figures out how we can do things to our best advantage. How we might impress someone, reduce our spending, what to have for dinner, plans for a dream vacation, whether we can afford that new house. This is all anxiety producing and is a product of our over-active brains, always figuring out the best way to ensure survival.

Desires, activity, haste, noise, energy expenditure, all take their toll, and are the breeding ground for anxiety. Let's consider the opposites.

First the bad news. For all intents and purposes we are the beast. Our daytime waking consciousness is merely a slave of the beast, but since this consciousness is what we call "I", we need to find ways to give "ourselves" some relief from its tyrannies. Here are the opposites to the way of the beast:

- Desire-less - This is not possible, but what is possible is to watch the desires. The understanding that comes from seeing them lessens their power.
- Dark - When people meditate they usually close their eyes to blank out visual distractions, and they also prefer silence. Darkness comes when energy diminishes. The night is often (unfortunately not always) a time of less energy, a time when the beast allows us to rest.
- Slow - Since we are addicted to desires and their manifestation through ambition we can only mitigate their effects for a short time. The haste that is associated with ambition can be checked for brief periods by simply performing a task with less haste.
- Relaxation - Since our natural state is activity, it requires skill to relax. Trying to relax is an oxymoron. When we are trying we are not relaxing. The key to relaxation is to simply watch the tension!
- Silence - Outer silence can be procured by finding a suitable location, but inner silence is a much rarer commodity. Once again, we can encourage inner silence by simply observing the noise in our heads.

This is a simple outline, and enough for anyone interested in a more pleasurable existence, to at least start down this path. In reality we also need to observe our emotional states, since there is no peace while emotions are on the rampage. But that is a whole other story.

The cause of suffering is desire - Second Noble Truth, The Buddha

DESIRE-LESS

Let's be realistic about this. We *are* desire. The beast is desire, and even the desire to be desire-less is a curse. But there is a way out. Instead of trying to diminish our desires, we just let them be. For short periods we can simply sit and observe our desires without trying to interfere or judge them. This is a simple idea but very difficult to execute. The beast will always rear its head, and we will want to judge what we are seeing, or modify our behavior in some way. Any attempt to modify behavior is simply the beast.

This sort of work requires a great deal of inner honesty since most of us are in deep denial about our desires. People who influenced when we were young may well have censored some of our behavior and as a result we censor ourselves. Maybe we were told that is was wrong to be angry, or that we should not be spiteful. These are natural expressions of the beast, and the ability to sit easily with them is quite difficult. This does not mean we randomly follow every whim that arises within us, and particularly ones that would cause harm to others. We are however allowed to acknowledge these desires without judgement. Even simple desires such as the sudden urge to have a coffee, phone a friend, browse our emails, and so on, can simply be observed.

DESIRE OBSERVATION

Find a time during the day when you will not be disturbed for five or ten minutes. Make sure you are relaxed (a couple of deep breathes with a slow out breath will help), and start to register the thoughts as they pass through your mind. Many people find that the thoughts stop when they try to watch them, but it is just a matter of practice to be able to observe while they run their course. Typically you will find conversations going on within your mind - maybe recalling past conversations with people or imagining conversations you will have. Trivial thoughts come into mind - whether to have a different hair style, what a particular person might have thought about you, tasks you are eager to do and those you do not want to do. Just watch them. Do not interfere or judge. During this period you should just watch and not act on the desires and impulses that arise. You might find this frustrating - just observe it. Don't overdo this exercise or your beast will rebel, and we don't want that. Ten minutes a day is fine and is enough to develop an understanding of what is going on within you - and understanding is everything.

Profound it is, dark and obscure - Lao Tsu

DARK

As the sun goes down so nature winds down its activities and rest comes to many creatures. Daytime is full of frantic activity - mating, building habitat, establishing territory and dominance, killing for food. Light is nature's energizer, and without it the whole carnival of carnage would come to a grinding halt.

Darkness is a time we typically relax and wind down from the exertions of the day. The beast is not so happy when darkness comes and finds ways to exert its influence - nightclubs, dining out, socializing. Clearly these activities relate to mating and dominance, feeding and social context respectively - all of keen interest to the beast. Most of us will want to do things of this nature, but we should not completely waste the opportunity that nighttime brings - the opportunity to go into ourselves.

As with all these themes, none of this is of interest to the beast and so it will require a certain amount of effort. Strange that we should have to make efforts to bring ceaseless activity to an end, but activity is the language of nature and this work is against nature. All we are trying to do here is make our lives more pleasant, and nature has no interest this, so the effort has to be ours.

DARK SITTING

Find a place that is quiet and dark. This might be a challenge for many people, but a bedroom is ideal. We just need ten minutes or so when we will be undisturbed. Sitting comfortably is best, but if there is no chair then lying down will suffice. Eyes should be open so we can "see" the darkness. We want to feel the peace and rest associated with the darkness, although thoughts will arise of their own accord. Simply acknowledge the thoughts and return to "seeing" the darkness. The body should be relaxed and a few deep breaths will help with this.

After the sitting bring your attention back to your ordinary life slowly. As with all these exercises ten minutes is enough. You will probably feel restless during your sitting in any case. Do not overdo it.

When ambition ends, happiness begins - Thomas Merton

HASTE

Ambition is the mark of the beast. Associated with every desire is an ambition, and this ambition causes us to seek to fulfill the desire. It is easy to know when ambition is driving us - we hurry. Haste is the curse associated with ambition and it ruins our experience of life. That people generally seem to be increasingly hasty illustrates very well that ambition is on the rise, and with it desire.

Examples of ambition abound. Rushing to catch a train is ambition. If there was no desire involved, we wouldn't rush. And it is worth reiterating that all desires spring from the one desire - the desire to persist in our existence. If the train is taking us to work, we will rush so that our livelihood is not threatened.

Ambition is obviously a generator of anxiety. Haste is the symptom of that anxiety as we rush toward some imagined future state of affairs and completely ignore the present. There is no way we can eliminate ambition from our lives, but we can take breaks from it. Our life is wholly driven by ambitions, large and small, and without ambition we could not exist. So it is not a matter of trying to eliminate ambition, but a matter of seeing it, and taking time out to rest from it.

Since haste is the direct manifestation of ambition we can expose our ambitions through a deliberate slowing down of what we are doing.

SLOW

As I type this page I have an ambition - to finish this short book in the least time possible. This ambition becomes more visible as I slow down, and with that visibility I can think clearly about why I want to finish so quickly. Well, that's my business. But by seeing the ambition and desire behind the haste it becomes easier to slow down. Because after all, while everything matters to the beast, in reality nothing matters other than my pleasure right here and now, since this is all I have. The net result is that I become less anxious. My body becomes more relaxed and my mind does not race as much.

We can only do something like this for brief periods - but that is all that is needed. Simply pick a short task (10 minutes or so) and perform it more slowly than usual.

The pleasures of wise men are relaxed - Seneca

RELAXATION

Activity, tension, haste and ambition are all marks of the beast. Relaxation is common in the world of animals as they conserve their energy for the hunt, but we seem to have forgotten how necessary it is. This is a side effect of our over-anxious minds, our 24x7 survival drive completely unable to let go, even for a short period.

Ideally we need to find a way to relax both body and mind, although there is a catch. We cannot *try* to relax. By doing so we will probably become more tense. And so once again we simply observe our thoughts and bodily tensions. In any case, even if we successfully relax a part of our body, as soon as the attention moves away it will tense up again. Fritz Perls in his book Gestalt recognizes our need for relaxation:

"There are occasions when it is appropriate to let go, grow hazy, and bask in animal comfort. That few of us can do this is a curse of our times - a consequence of "unfinished business" - but the ability to do so, which for the most part we know about only from envious watching of our house-hold tabby, is one that we can reacquire."

The essence of the situation is that we have forgotten even simple animal pleasures because of our over-alert brains, always looking for the next threat, opportunity or way to distract ourselves from "unfinished business".

DEATH POSE

The only yoga exercise I really liked was the death pose. It has a Sanskrit name, but I'll spare you the misery (besides which I can't remember it). We find a quiet place where we will not be disturbed for ten or fifteen minutes. Lay down on your back with arms and legs out straight. Hands should be six inches or so away from the torso and the feet separated by about a foot. We circulate our attention around the body, relaxing feet, legs, arms, hands, back, neck, shoulders - and so on. We do not "force" a relaxed state. Focus on your breathing - just watch it. At the same time sense the state of your body, moving the attention around various parts and simply registering their status. The shoulders are very often tense - leave them tense and just register. With repeated practice your body will learn to relax - and you probably will not want to come out of it.

Silence is Golden - The Tremeloes

SILENCE

Silence - both internal and external, consciously experienced, is the nearest thing to bliss. It assumes stillness, darkness and a quieting of the desires - which is why it is so rarely experienced.

It takes many forms. The simplest expression of silence is not to speak - to remain quiet when conditions allow. In many circumstances we are always trying to impress, to win an argument, to assert ourselves in some way. To have the presence such that we do not indulge in speaking, when normally we would, shows us immediately that much of it is unnecessary. This will not destroy our need to argue a point, boast, or talk simply to destroy the possibility of silence, but we will at least understand that much of our talking is quite mechanical.

Much more important however is inner silence. This will not happen until the desires have been calmed, and the only way the desires become calmed is by acknowledging the claims of the beast. These needs cannot be denied, and any attempt to do so will cause untold trouble - resentment, anger, envy, spitefulness. The beast will always find expression.

Inner silence, if it comes, is simply a gift. It isn't something we can achieve. The best we can do is observe the tumult that occupies our waking consciousness and acknowledge the thoughts and emotions that accompany it. We need to listen to what is going on within us without judgement, and positively acknowledge what we hear.

As an exercise we can set aside ten minutes or so and simply observe our thoughts and emotions. Easier said than done, but this is the best we can do. Sooner or later we may get a glimpse of inner silence, and that is all we need - just a glimpse. Cioran expresses it well:

"Silence is unbearable: what strength it takes to settle into the concision of the inexpressible!"

OTHER RESOURCES

Working alone is very difficult, and so there are other additional resources - some free and some requiring a financial contribution.

FREE RESOURCES

The Corporeal Fantasy Youtube channel has over 150 podcasts on related topics.

The Martin Butler Youtube channel is where all new podcasts are being published.

The Martin Butler website with blog postings and excerpts from the great sages.

Free books of various lengths.

OTHER RESOURCES

The Patreon Channel with in-depth analysis of the works of various sages.

Mentoring on a weekly basis with one of two qualified mentors.

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